

TODD McFARLANE, DÆRICK GRÖSS, SKY COMICS

ARENA

MAGAZINE

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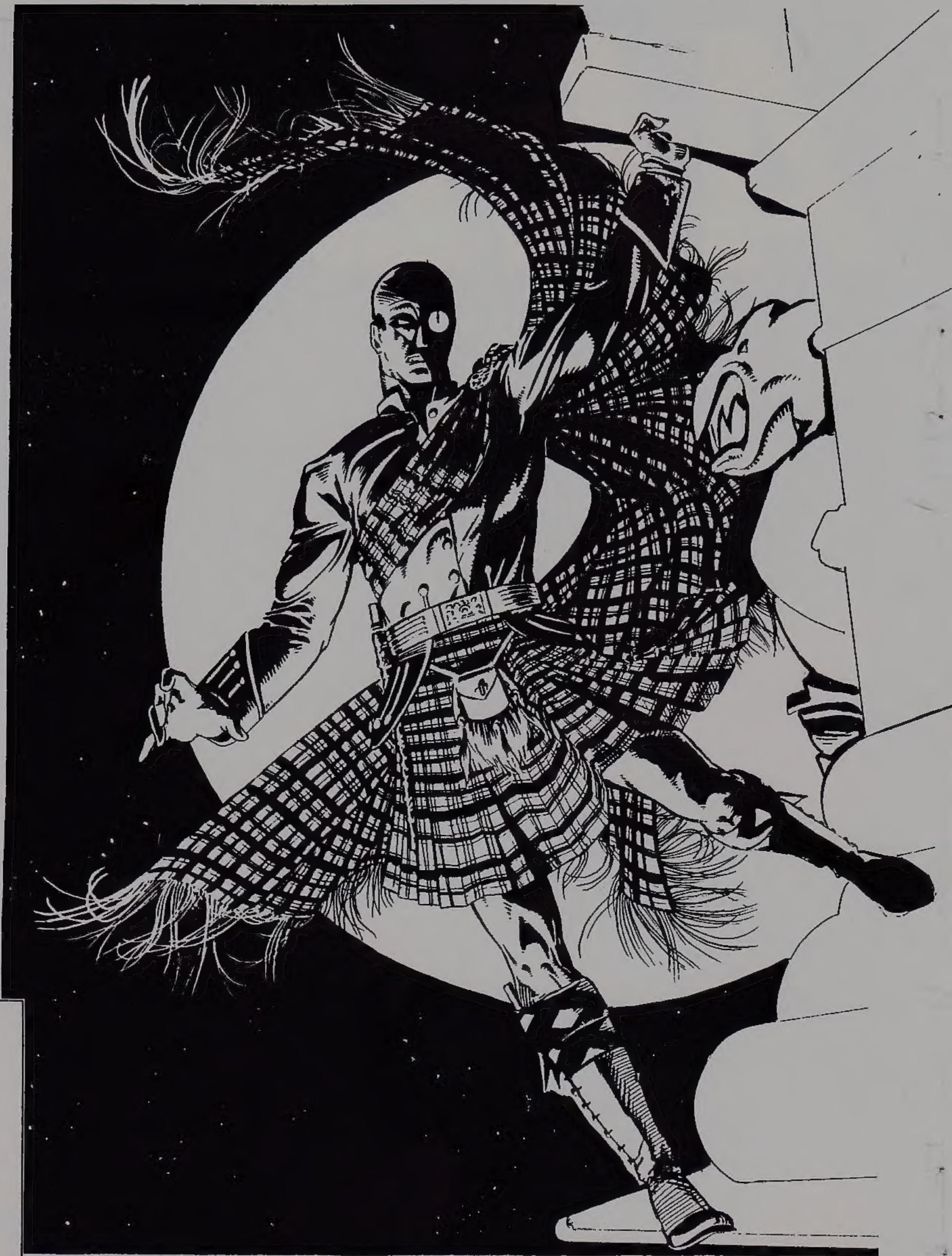
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**DAVE DORMAN &
STEVE BISSETTE
INTERVIEWED**

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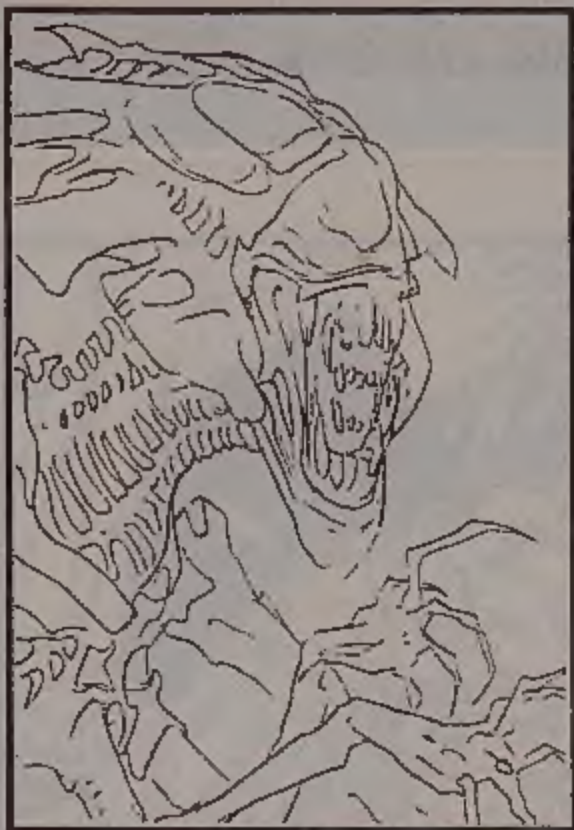


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About The Cover ...

Dave Dorman beautifully renders one ticked off Alien who's definitely in the frying pan!

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Editorial

Our subject this month is polybagging.

Obviously, if you're reading this editorial then odds are that you may have come into contact with polybagging. *Arena Magazine* is shipped to the comic shelves in this transparent, malleable container in order to bring you inserts, usually but not limited to the form of trading cards. That way the cards are not glued, bound or otherwise stapled into the book and deterring you from adding them to your already extensive collection.

BUT...polybagging. The question is posed thus: **Does it Help or Hinder?**

"I find that if I see a book bagged on the shelves with a trading card," says F.B. Collector, "then WOW! What a collectable! Nothing in the bag has ever been touched by human hands! The worth can only go up!"

Wrong answer... I suppose. Hmm. The guy did buy the book. He never opened it but he bought it. The fact of the matter is, we like to sell *Arena*. We'd love for you to read it.

Getting back to the question. Does polybagging help the sales of the book or hinder it? I've heard arguments from both sides (actually before my very eyes at a recent convention) and it goes a little something like this:

"Polybag *Arena* with a trading card from a major company," says Doug Hiscock of Styx International, "and I guarantee that your sales will increase 300% *Wizard's* did."

So did ours -- 450%, actually.

But, I've heard numerous and sundry fans remark, "Hey, if I

can't see what a book looks like on the inside, I won't buy it." For them, a cool cover and a pretty bag isn't enough to sell our product.

Our very publisher's main concern is this... "Are we teeing any readers off by polybagging our book? They buy it and take it home, open it up and find that the interiors are something that they weren't expecting?"

My reply is always the same, "Maybe. But if they take a few minutes to actually read some of our book, they might find that it's *more* than what they were expecting."

Still the question begs, Does it help? Does it hinder? If it's bagged that means it's got to have something collectable in it. If it's not bagged, you can pick it up and see if it's actually worth buying (for purposes of self-interest, not speculation). If it's bagged, all contents are protected! If it's not bagged, hmmm... well, you tell me. I've rambled enough.

Adios, mis amigos,

JOE

Joe Martin



Next Issue: John Byrne!



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AND AGAIN.
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AND AGAIN.

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Thrown To The Lions!

CORRESPONDENCE & ADVICE



Welcome to another grand edition of "Thrown to the Lions"! The amount of letters we've been receiving are somewhat dwindling, even as our circulation is rising ever higher with each phenomenal issue.

First of all, to inspire readers to write even more letters, here's an offer you can't refuse. If you write us and we publish your letter here in "Thrown to the Lions" you will receive the very next issue of *Arena Magazine* absolutely and without a doubt **free of charge!** How does that sound for a little motivation? Then, get writing!

Second, get those retailers of yours to order more issues of *Arena*! The fun has just begun! These guys don't know what they're missing! By sticking it out when the weather was bad, by battling our way against and beyond the elements, we have grown into a force to be recognized!

Onward and Tally-Ho!!

Yo, *Arena* Dudes!

You guys are way cool! No *Arena*'s for one month and then two in the same month! What's going on? I don't mind getting two *Arena*'s in one month, especially with this new format! Are you guys going bi-weekly or are you just catching up? I noticed you were like a month or so late. But speaking of the new covers - WOW! I love it! I wrote before that you guys should go full bleed. Glad you listened. Now it really jumps off the shelves, grabs you by a readily-available body part and makes you buy it or else!

Excellent new logo, too.
Coolness!

Sam "The Man" Koch
Ponchatrane, LA

Thanks, Man, you are one nutty guy! Really, though, we owe you one. That full bleed suggestion has made all the difference. I hope *Arena* doesn't grab your body parts too hard!

Dear "Thrown To The Lions",

I like *Arena Magazine*. It seems to be doing things the right way. It takes a much different approach to the industry in so far that it has an interview just as comprehensive as a lot of interviews done by *Comics Interview*, just as much news as *Comics Buyer's Guide*, and a cool, slick cover just like *Wizard Magazine*. It's like you've taken the strengths of a lot of other fanzines and made them yours. Now, I can get the best of all in *Arena Magazine*.

So, when are you guys going color? Not that you should. A format like *Amazing Heroes* works well in *Arena*.

My biggest problem is that I recently moved and the closest comic shop is like 60 miles away. A friend of mine got me in touch with the Westfield subscription service but they don't carry *Arena Magazine*. For some reason, I'd rather go through Westfield than subscribe because I'm a fickle reader (yes, I admit it). Can you help me with some kind of reply?

Thanks,

Sheldon Lee
Golden Beach, MD

Sheldon, I wanted to print your letter for two reasons. First, you're the first person who has written to us mentioning so many different comic news publica-

tions - five in all - and I thought that was pretty interesting. Second, Westfield has received a package of *Arena*'s from us and we'll be receiving a reply in due time if they're interested in offering *Arena* in their subscription service. Keep your eyes peeled (Ouch!).

Dear "Thrown To The Lions",

I like the new format very much! A new logo, a new cover design, bright colors! It looks like you guys are getting it together. Now, just work on your timing. I don't mean to be picky and I'm sure your jobs are difficult but timeliness is a very important factor, especially with a news-related book like *Arena*.

I'm writing mostly about the *WildStar* interview. First, *WildStar* #1 came out before *Arena* #8 and I'm sure that wasn't planned but still, it happened. The interview was still fantastic and I have to say that this is the best interview that Joe Martin has ever done simply because the whole mood of the piece was light. It seemed like he, Jerry Ordway and Al Gordon were having a lot of fun. Of course, the interview with TSR's Brom was really funny and very enjoyable. The remark about "lancing boils" made me laugh out loud.

All in all, if you guys take care of the timeliness problem, *Arena* will be the number one fan mag on the market. Well, maybe not in sales but I bet you'll get there soon enough! I mean, I'd rather read words from Bob Hickey or Joe Martin - good All-American names - than Gareb Shamus anyday!

Good luck and keep up the great work!

Sincerely,

Scott Thompson
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

Jeez, Scott, thanks but I think Gareb's an American. You're Canadian, aren't you? I suppose there are such things as patriotic Canadian-Americans, or is that American-Canadians? Aw, who knows! Hey, have you ever been to Moose Jaw? Now, that's a place I want to visit! Anyway, if you're reading this, then you must know by now that Arena Magazine is back on a monthly schedule and there to stay. That's right. No more sloughing off for us. We ain't slackers. No, sir! You just won't see it happen. Nope.

Dear Arena,

I thoroughly enjoy Arena and Jerry Smith's "Comics Now" are always very up front and a column that I find myself looking forward to reading. He seems to have a real anti-Image chip on his shoulder, though. Is there a real reason for this? I mean, who couldn't like *Cyberforce*? Oh, well. He probably doesn't like *WildStar*, either.

The way I see it, Marvel is a thing of the past. I don't read Marvel because they don't care. They're corporate. All they want is my money and they hire crappy artists just to crank out mediocre stories about mediocre heroes. I'm sick of it. Image is about creators who are doing what they love and they make more money, have better coloring and much better art. They may not be the best writers all the time but I still enjoy each and every issue because these guys are doing what they want and owning every damn

page of it. So, as far as I see it, Image Comics is the wave of the future and if Jerry doesn't like it, maybe he should limit himself to the dying breed, Marvel and DC.

Yours,

Gary Franks
Green Bay, WI

I hear what you're saying, Gary, and there's a little bit of truth in them there words. Jerry did enjoy WildStar, by the way.

Dear Arena Magazine,

Your interview with Lurene Haines in Arena #7 really took me by surprise. I didn't know that the lady has done so much work in comics as a whole. By goodness, the lady keeps herself busy! It was also peculiar to find out that she and David Dorman are married. That's an item of interest of which I had no idea. What a lucky fellow! That is an approach your magazine occasions. It seems to get a little bit more behind-the-scenes, if you will, of the comic industry. I believe that is something you fellows should strive to achieve with each and every edition.

Also, the "Partial List of Credits" helps immensely. I hope that is a continuing feature when you are able to compile something of that nature. I understand that with chaps like John Byrne a "List" would be nearly impossible but helpful nonetheless.

Now, I must say that Paul Birch's "Brit Bits" is a wonderful little piece of work. Mr. Birch covers so much information in so few words yet it is entirely cohesive! Well done,

sir.

Very good! Keep up the exquisite work, gentlemen, and good day!

Sincerely,

Colin Coperman
Tewksbry, England

The "Partial List of Credits" that you mentioned, Colin, was provided by Lurene herself. We have mentioned to professionals we interview that such a thing would be helpful and interesting but time constraints make this kind of compilation a difficult task indeed. Yes, Dave Dorman is a lucky fellow and I'm certain he'd be the first to tell you this. Also, I'm certain, in addition, that Paul Birch appreciates your kind words and offers a hearty "Thanks, good chap!" in return.

Thanks everyone, and keep writing! Remember the offer! Free Arenas!

NEXT! Get ready because here comes John Byrne! And James Hudnall! And Chris Wozniak! And Tom and Mary Bierbaum! And lots more! Be here! It's going to be fun! See ya!



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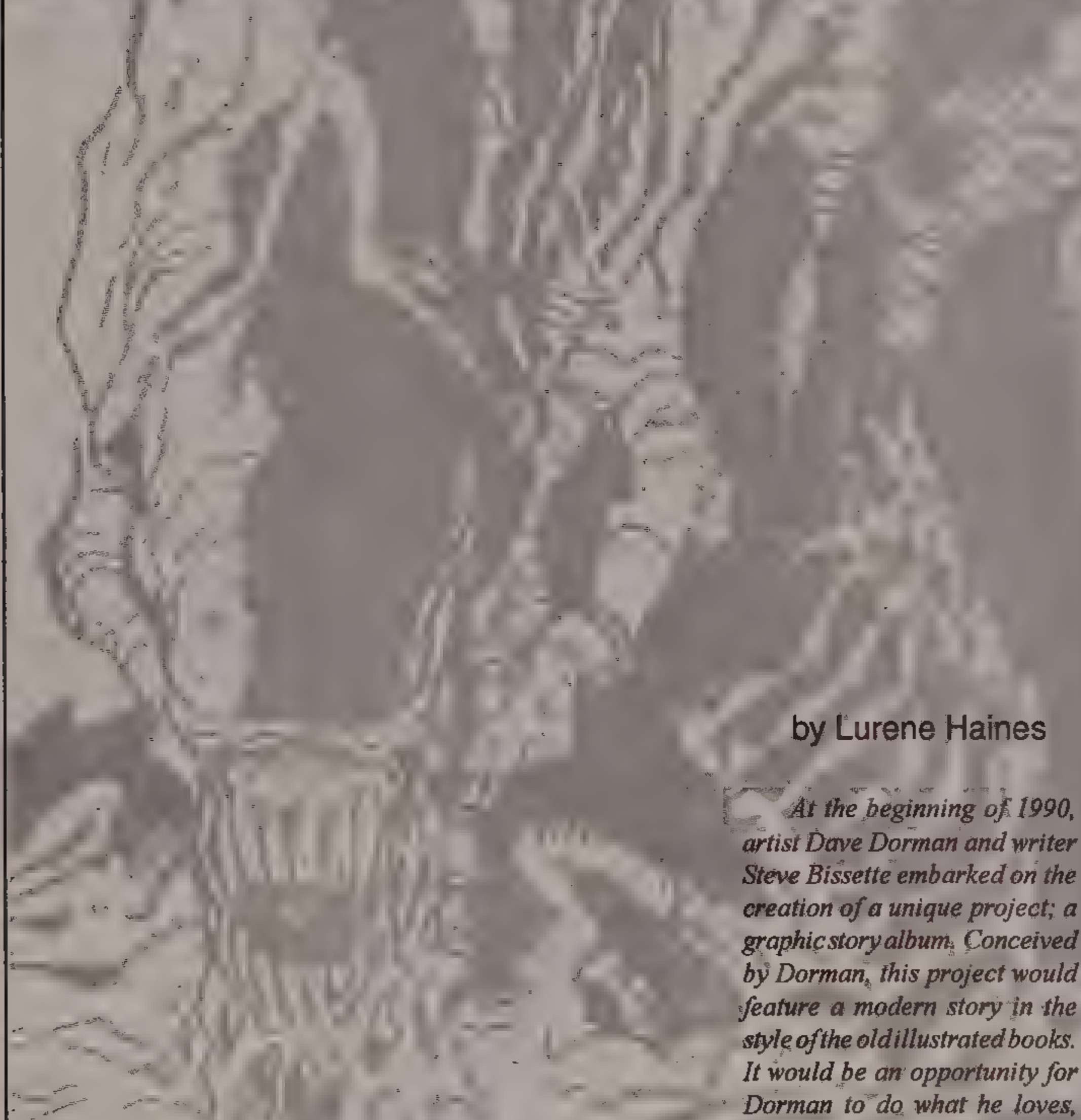
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Dave Dorman Steve Bissette



by Lurene Haines

At the beginning of 1990, artist Dave Dorman and writer Steve Bissette embarked on the creation of a unique project; a graphic story album. Conceived by Dorman, this project would feature a modern story in the style of the old illustrated books. It would be an opportunity for Dorman to do what he loves, and does best; create fabulous, painted, full color illustrations that bring fantastic stories to life. It was also a chance for comic writer, Bissette, to break new ground in the prose market.

In May of 1992, Dark Horse Comics premiered the hard-cover edition of *Aliens: Tribes*. Now that the trade paperback is on the stands, Dorman and

The **Aliens: Tribes** Interview

Bissette have a few things to say about this amazing piece of work.

LH: Dave, I'll start with you, because I understand this started as your little brainstorm. What triggered the idea for Aliens: Tribes?

DD: Well, I was trying to find a project that would be suitable for my strong point in the field, which is single illustration. I had pretty much established myself as a cover illustrator, obviously doing single illustrations, but I wanted a format that would be a little bit larger and more encompassing of the type of work I'd like to do. The illustrated book format was well-suited for that, so I decided to approach Dark Horse with the possibility of doing an illustrated book. Now, there was no idea, storyline or anything at that point, it was just to test the waters to see if they would be interested in pursuing a project of that nature. (Mike) Richardson was very enthusiastic about it and we sort of beat it

around a little bit. He said, "Why don't we go with a project that is very popular, and has already built an audience?" At that time, about three years ago now, they were moving ahead with developing a lot of Aliens material, so he suggested we use Aliens as a jumping-off point.

LH: When you suggested this idea, did you have a writer in mind, or was this something Richardson pursued? Or did you two beat around some names, and come up with somebody in particular?

DD: At that time, we had decided to do an Aliens book, and Richardson said he was going to contact a couple of writers. I said that I'd be pretty much able to work with anyone, although I would have to give an okay. But, Richardson pretty much took care of contacting the writers, and I believe he was the one who contacted Steve (Bissette) originally.

LH: Steve, is that true? Is that how you came on board?

SB: That's true! I got a call

from out of the blue from Mike. It was January of 1990, and he called and asked if I'd be interested in working on an Aliens project. I said no, I didn't really want to draw something. He said, "Oh, no! Writing." And that was attractive to me. What was even more attractive was when I found out about the format of the project. It was exactly what I wanted to be doing.

LH: The illustrated album format?

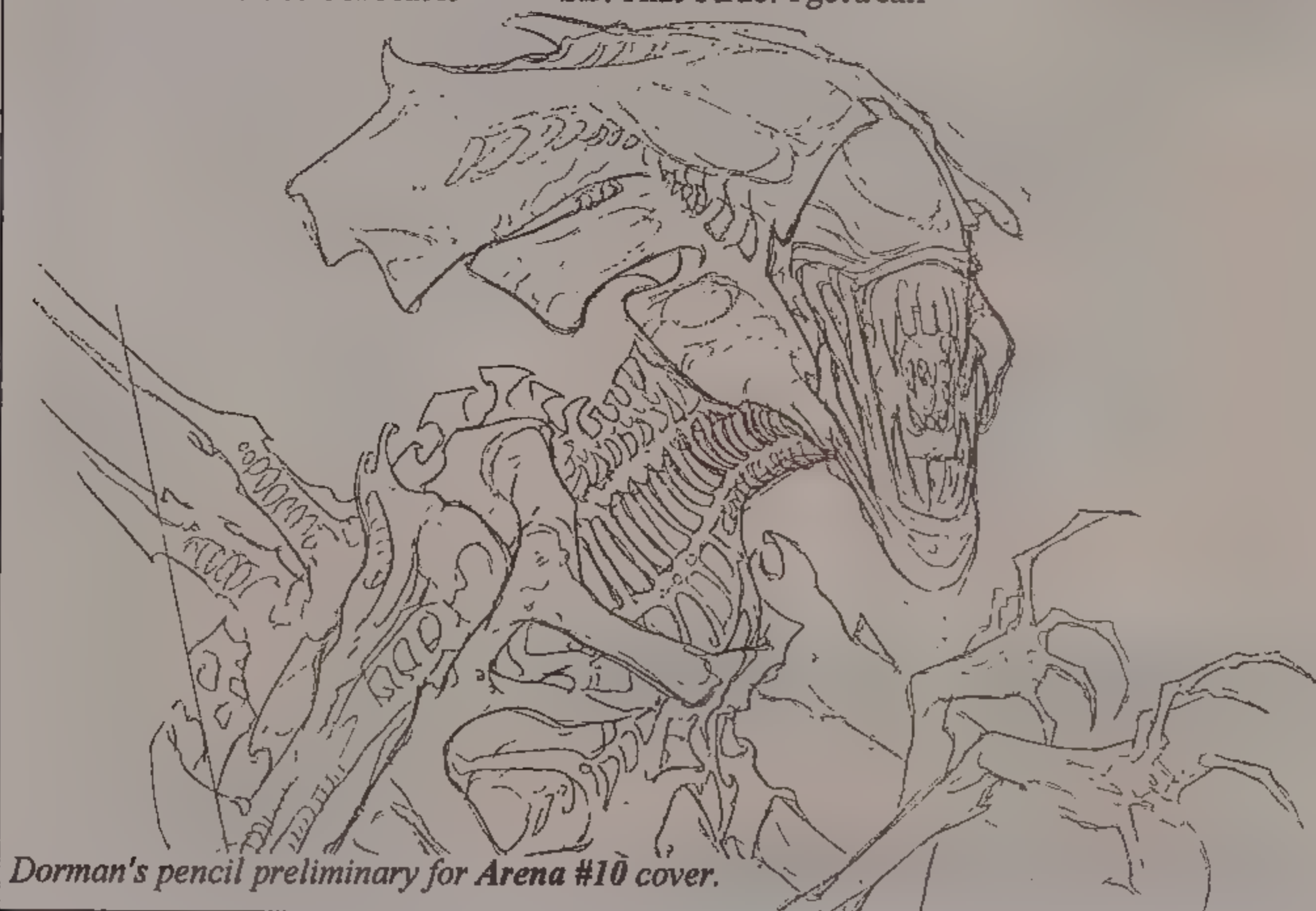
SB: Yeah, a written novella if you will - even though I've been told not to use that word - as opposed to a graphic novel or a comic series.

DD: You were interested in pursuing it as a prose piece, rather than a comic book.

SB: Exactly, exactly! And I was also excited at the opportunity to work with Dave. Dave and I had known each other since the Kubert School days, but we'd never worked together.

LH: You were at the Kubert School together?

DD: Yes, we overlapped in 1978. Steve started there a year



Dorman's pencil preliminary for Arena #10 cover.

earlier and I stayed through 1979.

SB: I'd been following Dave's work through the years, with the covers and so on. It sounded like a lot of fun.

LH: So you never had a chance to work together before *Aliens: Tribes*?

DD: Well, we never actually worked together, but there were a few projects at the Kubert School that we were both involved in, although not as a creative team. Not together, anyway, but as part of a larger team.

SB: Pretty nightmarish projects!

DD: (Laughs)

LH: Such as . . . ?

SB: We won't talk about those! (Laughs)

DD: (Laughs) It was starting-out stuff. A lot of production stuff and some things with the war books that DC Comics was publishing at the time. You know, *that* type of thing. But we never actually collaborated on any real projects. As Steve mentioned following my career, well I was following his as well. All the people I had met at the Kubert School, I hoped to, and did, keep in touch with over the years. It was real good to be involved with Steve on a project, after our lengthy history together.

SB: It was also exciting, because the format was not a new one. As Dave and I covered in our first conversation (about the project), we both loved the old approach to illustrated storybooks. Other than children's books and the juvenile market, they just seem to have dropped out of existence. Or certainly faded. That was exciting, to be able to do something like this. We're not quite

Howard Pyle material yet, but we did our best.

LH: Let's get this next question out of the way. I've heard this asked by a number of people; where did the title "*Tribes*" come from and how does it directly relate to the story?

SB: Well, the title came from Dave.

DD: Right. At the time when Mike approached me to do the book, I had started beating a couple of ideas around. He told me to think of an approach I wanted to take, and then we'd talk it over, get a writer on board, and see where we can go with it. At that time I was thinking about a storyline that involved a group of humans against a hive of aliens. I was thinking about doing something in the vein of *The Lord Of The Flies*, where a group of humans start to dehumanize, and the group of aliens starts to become more intelligent as they fight each other and amongst themselves. So at that point I came up with the title "*Tribes*", which fits for the tribe of aliens and the tribe of humans, and I think has sort of a primal sound to it. The title worked out. It's short, it's very simple, and it just stuck. Even throughout the working and re-working of the story. Even after my original story idea was eliminated and Steve's storyline was developed. There are elements in there that were leftover, but pretty much the title stuck.

SB: I tried to keep the feel of the story that Dave had originally talked to me about. My dilemma with the story - being faced with writing essentially a long short-story - was that the scope of Dave's original idea seems much more ambitious

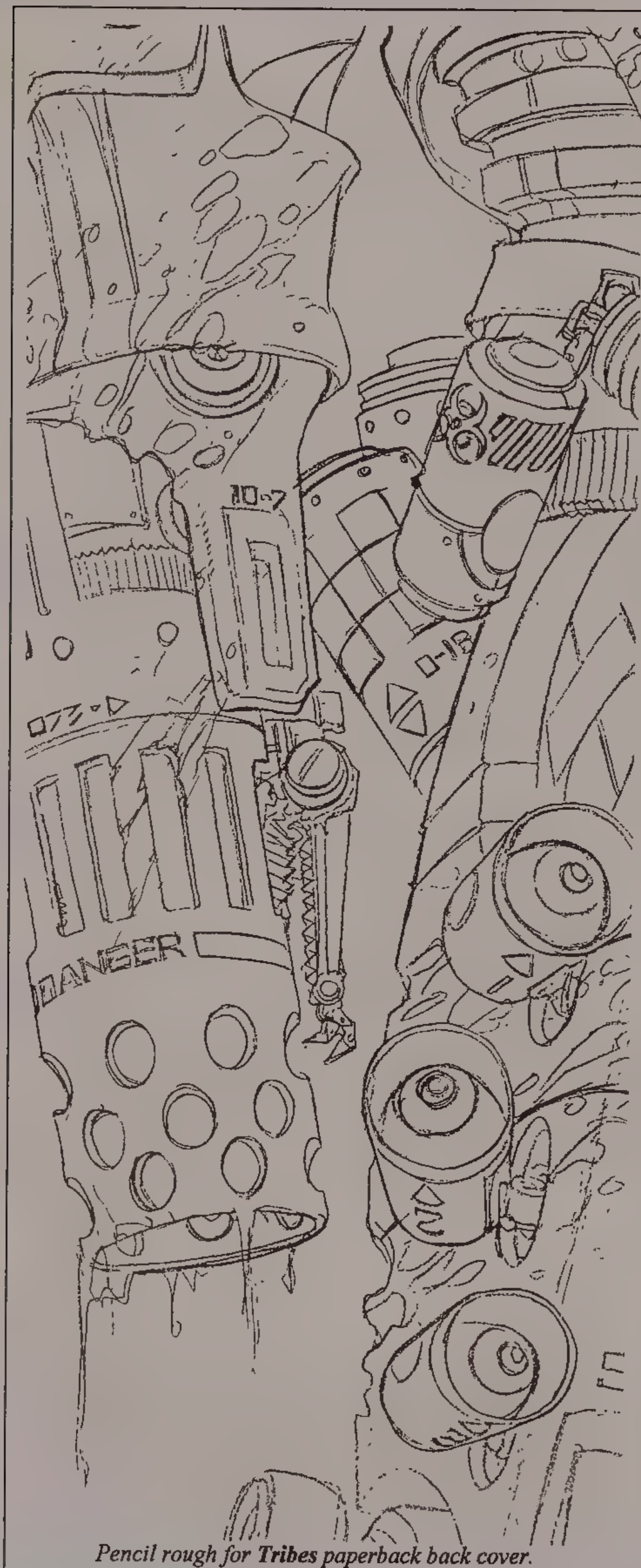
than the format we were working in could have accommodated. But I tried to keep the feel of the narrative that Dave had originally started with.

I subscribe to the approach to short story and novella writing that Edgar Allen Poe outlined, not only in his work but in a very famous essay, where a short story or novella is essentially a mood piece. You're dealing with a limited canvas. Having the entire story set aboard a hospital space station gave us a small enough canvas to work within in the finite framework of the story, but it also gave us a big enough canvas for a lot of action and a lot of opportunity for Dave's illustrations to breathe and to move in directions he wanted to go.

I also had to work with a limited cast, and again the possibilities that Dave's original story suggested (and I still think it's a good story, and it should be done) were just too much for what was essentially a long short-story. That was another reason for boiling it down a bit. Also, Mike had asked me specifically to have this piece springboard off the *Dark Horse Aliens* universe, rather than just the movies. And that's what brought in the whole narrative about the religious order. A lot of people have commented to me that they thought I came up with all that. Nope, it was Mark Verheiden. It was just really trying to build on what Mark had done in the first *Aliens* series that Verheiden and Mark Nelson did.

DD: A storyline that I think has a lot of potential in the *Aliens* universe, but has been pretty much dropped, from what I've been seeing lately.

SB: Yup, yup. I think there's enormous potential with that



Pencil rough for Tribes paperback back cover.

one. I think it's also applicable, maybe down the road, in finally having a wide enough canvas for Dave's story to be told. The religious aspect with the tribe angle, especially given the whole idea of castaways, if you will. A group of humans that are stranded, and how people in that situation tend to fall back on their most fundamental religious beliefs about themselves and God. Certainly, it's applicable to the story ideas that Mark Verheiden originally came up with. Which aren't even *implicit* in the movies. I think that's one thing that Mark brought to the series that was *really* original.

LH: So when you got started on this Tribes story, you left the physical descriptions of your characters fairly loose. Was this intentional?

SB: Yeah, yeah. I really felt like part of my job, part of the reason Richardson came to me, was because I was an artist as well. He and Randy (Stradley) had followed my writing, and they felt that I would work well with Dave. Of course, the fact that we had known each other years before wouldn't hurt. I really wrote it with the thought in mind that Dave should have a lot of room to play in. And that's really how I thought of it. Obviously, doing twenty-five full oil paintings is an arduous task for anybody. The more room there was for Dave to just cut loose, rather than having to follow the minutiae of some description that *I* would stick in there, the better time he would have and the better the chance that the paintings would become something meaningful to him rather than just a job. Also, it was an illustrated novel. One of the big problems in comics,

and in illustrated storybooks, is the redundancy. You don't need to *tell* the reader and then *show* the reader. They should compliment each other. And I think we ended up with a package that did that.

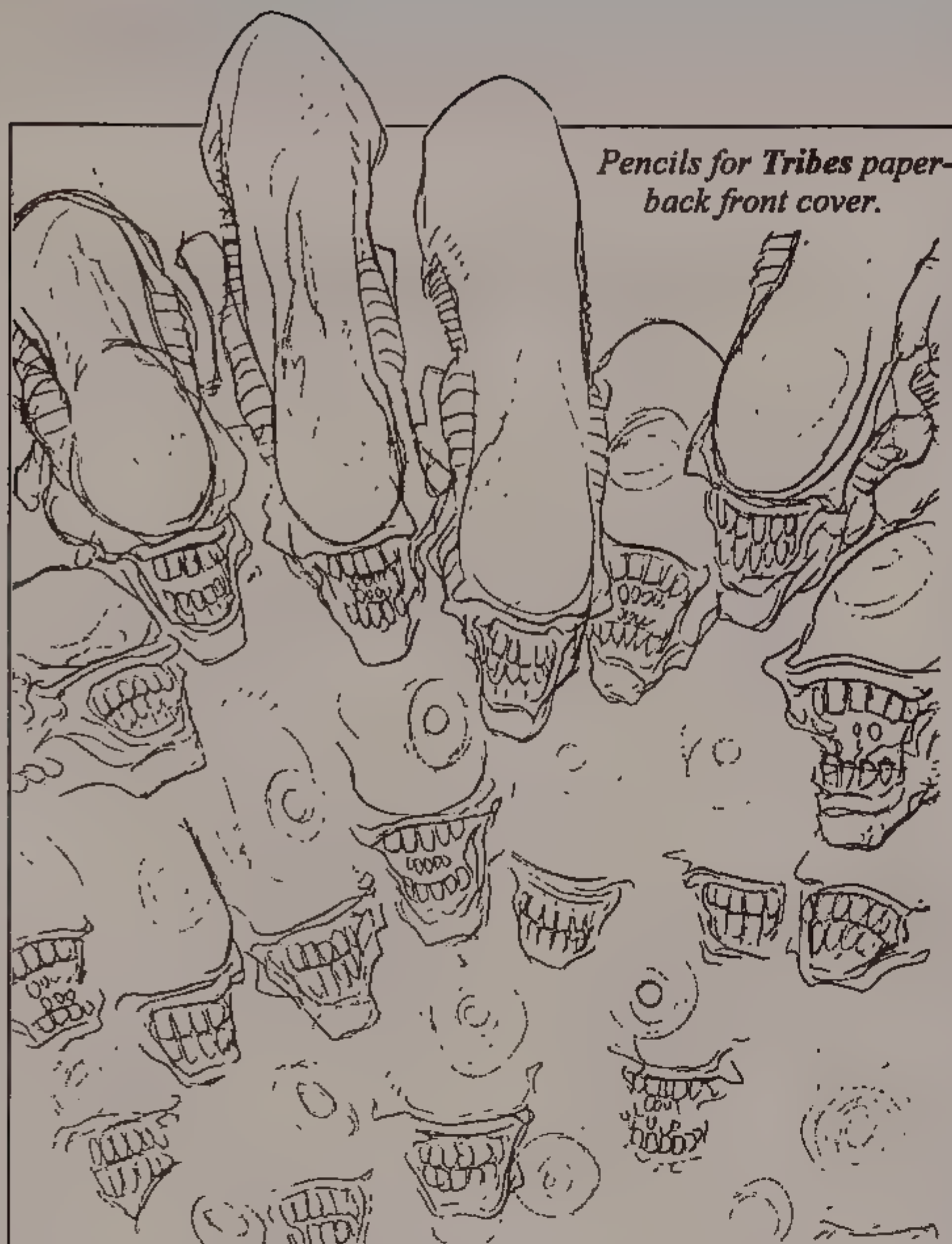
DD: Right. I think it worked out very well, like you say, without the redundancy of a descriptive passage up against a visual piece that says pretty much the same thing. We were able to move the story a bit quicker as well. But we did collaborate quite heavily on the creation of the characters. There was a lot of back-and-forth going on. Deciding who has what weaponry, particular races and genders of characters. That type of thing. So it wasn't just Steve was describing a male soldier going about fighting the aliens. There was some description going on, both artistically on my part and verbally on Steve's part, before we got into the finished stages of it.

SB: Another thing we did during that process, was we'd sometimes name an actor or a personality that one or the other of us was picturing as being such-and-such a character. I remember specifically, the doctor. *Nightbreed* (the movie) had just come out. I was familiar with David Cronenberg, but I wasn't sure how familiar his face was to Dave. So I mentioned it to him, that the doctor should be like that; that kind of blend of very cool intellect and exterior, but obviously something very twisted going on under there.

That was another thing, I was really happy Dave did, taking the extra license with the illustrations. I think that was part of the give and take of having the story a bit open in

Pencil art for Tribes black and white inserts.





Pencils for Tribes paperback front cover.

terms of physical description. I was especially delighted with that final portrait of the doctor, when Dave took it about ten steps further than it's described in the story. It's a really powerful illustration that cranks up the impact of the text. Whatever the reader is picturing in their mind as they read it, they turn that page, and that illustration pushes the envelope a bit further. I think that's what this format should do. There should be a real organic complementing of the illustration and the text.

LH: So would you say then, with working back and forth, that Dave's visual designs influenced the actual character development?

SB: Oh, definitely. But the tightest drawings I got to see prior to the final paintings. . . God, I was into the final draft! But as Dave said, we talked throughout this. We both had

very clear pictures in our heads and we're pretty good about being able to communicate it to the other person. I think I saw some early designs, but I didn't see the tighter sketches until the final stages of the writing. But it did influence the final draft, I think. I did get to see eight or nine of the paintings while I was working on the second draft, so that really influenced the final draft for me. So, yeah, Dave definitely had an impact on the final shape of the characters.

DD: However, two of the most visually interesting characters had to be cut out in the final draft.

SB: Yeah, yeah. Dee and Dum, out the door.

DD: Yup.

SB: I had two characters, Dee and Dum. It was a male-female team pretty much extrapolated from the Hispanic soldier and her ambiguous boyfriend who were in the second

Aliens film. Dave and I bounced around ideas, because Dave was into that weaponry they had, that sort-of hydraulic arm, and we juiced that. But those characters had to go when we were in the clinch, in the final stretch. Luckily, they were cut before Dave and had even gotten too far into any paintings involving those characters.

DD: That was a very fortunate aspect of this major cut that went on during the last quarter of the work process. It just worked out so that the characters that were cut were not characters that were finished in any form, on any of the paintings. So we were able to restructure the writing work in the final draft around which paintings were finished at the time. That was an arduous process in itself!

SB: (Laughs) Was it ever!

LH: This brings me to the next question I had. There are a lot of characters in this story, and it almost seems like you took a repertory company-type approach; no single strong character, but major contributions from many characters. That can be a very hard thing for a writer to tackle. You have to keep everyone balanced and still not lose the story focus. I'm curious what made you choose that approach?

SB: It was difficult. There are a number of answers here, but I'll give them all to you. Lucky you! The first reason is, it was a challenge for me as a writer. I had done stories with single characters before. Part of what made this an intriguing job for me to take on was that aspect of trying to juggle many characters in a single, contained narrative that had to stand on its own. It had to have

a clear beginning, middle and end, and strong action driving it. That was one of the challenges that led me to say yes. I wanted to take that on. I hadn't done that yet as a writer.

The second reason is that it was primarily a military story. The first film, *Alien*, is a horror movie. It's not that different from an old 'haunted house' movie. It's structured with a small cast of characters who are basically there as body-count fodder. It's very clear from the orientation of the film as it continues, who are heroine or hero is - in this case, Ripley, the Sigourney Weaver character. But the second film - which was a real crowd-pleaser, and which I still consider an excellent film - was a war movie. It was important to me that we emulate that. Dave and I had talked about that early on. That was one of the aspects that we felt Dark Horse had done correctly, following up on the second film rather than just the first film. With that said, the fact that it was, in essence, a war story relates to how I grew up.

I grew up in a semi-military family. My father was in a number of branches of the service, as were many of my relatives and my brother and sister. I avoided it, but I understood fairly well how the military worked. It's very much a team. The whole basis of the military, of boot camp, is to drill into your head that you are not an individual, you are a member of a team. If you are not a team player, you are in for big trouble or you just don't belong. For this (story) to really reflect how the military operates, I felt that it had to be a repertory company, because that *is* how it (the military) works. The break-

down toward the end of the story, when things really begin to go wrong, is the breakdown of the team. That was the movement of the narrative. That was one of the things that worked so well in the *Aliens* movie. The other thing that worked well, was that the team members that stayed together very much had your sympathy as an audience, as a viewer.

Another reason was that it was reflective of the title. Dave mentioned earlier where the title, which was his suggestion, had come from. I felt the title was still applicable. It is still about tribal warfare, with one tribe being the alien tribe and the other being this group of

military personnel who are brought in. Both of them are played off one another by this strange character in the middle, who has his own agenda, is *not* a team player, and is very much operating on his own.

Finally, it was a horror story. A horror story with a single character, especially one that involves this kind of action and this kind of threat, very much becomes a matter of whether he or she will live or die. I wanted it to be much more than that. By not having it clearly defined from page one, who our heroes and heroines and villains were, I think it was a much more successful story. It involved you on a level other





than the “are they going to live, are they going to die,” and as characters do die in the story, the story doesn’t come to an end at that point. It keeps going. There’s a bigger canvas to work with.

LH: Dave, did having this repertory group affect how you approached the illustration of the book?

DD: Not really, no. Because I was illustrating the story as it progressed from one point to the next, I was taking images out of the story that would work during that particular section. Unlike a comic book, say, where you have a hero and you follow that hero through his adventures, and he’s pretty much visualized as the focus of the story. Here, we didn’t have a focus character, we had a *group* of characters. So, no one group of paintings focused on any particular character. I tried to illustrate the characters evenly throughout the book, as the story progressed. Until we get to the point where we find that Rat is the main sympathetic character in the story. If you do take a page count of the illustrations in the book, you’ll see that each character pretty much has two pieces, maybe three pieces, devoted to them. I think Rat has four pieces, and the aliens have four to five. There is no concentration on one particular character, so it (the repertory group) did not affect how I approached the illustration.

LH: Steve, did you intend to conclude the story where the attention ended up focusing on Rat, or did it just naturally progress that way?

SB: One of the pleasures of working with a big cast, was that I got to kind of feel my way around. Usually when I go into

D.

a story - whether I'm writing it, or writing *and* drawing it, or even just drawing it from a script that someone else has written - I have to choose who my focal character is going to be. In this case I was able to find my way to that. As Dave can attest, in the original draft, Rat didn't make it. In fact with original draft - which I'm still happy with - one of the things that we all discussed was that it was almost too much of a horror story, it was too downbeat. And it felt wrong. I had to get that one out of my system, if only to see how I felt about it. One of the things you can do when you're writing fiction is to play things out to their end and take a week or two to look at it and decide whether it works for you or not. And you haven't really killed anybody. (Laughs) Just words on paper.

So, in the original draft, Rat did not make it. The ending was quite different. The only thing that was sure from day one, was the ending involving the doctor. I did know where the ending was going, not just from the first *draft*, but from the first *outline*. The outline that Dave and Mike saw, had a very straightforward beginning, and the ending was almost word for word what I went with. But in the original draft, Rat did die. As I was working on the story, I found her character particularly engaging, and it was kind of a relief when both Dave and Mike said "Can't she live?" (Laughs) Then I was able to say, yes, I can do this. To my mind it turned out to be a much better story at that point, too.

I don't tie my ego up in writing. That's something that Mike probably still doesn't believe. But I had said it to Dave and Mike right from the start -

any changes, any ideas, just jump in. I was always happy to take the story in a different direction. So Dave's suggestions and Mike's suggestions, it was like following another thread. When you're putting a story together you're sort of weaving a tapestry, and I like unraveling those things and taking them in another direction. And right to the end, I think the final book is a little stronger than the final manuscript. Although I missed Dee and Dum - the characters that were cut - and I know Dave was looking forward to doing them. But I think it's a better piece of work now without them. We'll do them another time.

LH: You used some very powerful flashbacks in the story for Rat. That's some pretty emotional material. Did you draw on some personal experiences to write that?

SB: We went through a family crisis here, that involved one of the family members dealing with memories that emerged, completely unbidden, years and years and years after the events. That completely turned my life over, and my whole family's life upside-down. But we dealt with it. We all worked together on it. That entire aspect of the story was drawn from that experience. I was not abused as a child, just the typical baggage that most kids go through, but I drew from the experiences of someone I very much love. That was another reason it was relief when Dave and Mike said "Can't the character live?" (Laughs) A less pessimistic outcome. But that was a battle with Mike. He really chopped that (the flashback sections) back, but I insisted that it was just too crucial



to the character. And it was particularly crucial since she ends up being the heroine of the story.

At the time I was starting on the piece - and bear in mind this took a fair while, this was a two year process - I didn't know how things were going to go. I think my original draft very much reflected my own fears. When I write, I try to write about things that affect me. In this case - and I think of *Tribes* being very much a horror story, as well as an action story - I was putting things I'm afraid of down on the page. That's how I work. I think the original draft reflected my fears. I think the later draft reflected my optimism about the day-to-day situation I was dealing with. I'm just glad that Dave and Mike decided to keep her alive!

LH: Dave, from the point of view of being the designer, as well as the illustrator, did you have trouble coming up with a cohesive look to the package? Did you have a specific idea in the back of your mind when you started?

DD: Well, I had some specific goals I wanted to achieve in the design and illustration of this book. Mike has some very specific ideas on what he wanted to do with the book, as well. Steve said, "I'm putting it in your hands!" (Laughs)

SB: I did?

DD: (Laughs again) Yeah. (They both laugh loudly) So Steve was pretty much out of the loop on the production and the actual design of the book. He just left it up to me. I worked with Richardson and Jerry Prosser, and eventually Barbara Kesel, at Dark Horse. I think we achieved about eighty percent of what I was looking

for in the book. Because it was a new project, that hadn't even been attempted in this business before, Dark Horse didn't know how to really go about it. We were all like children, sort of fumbling our way, trying to figure out the best way to achieve what we wanted. We ran into problems along the way. The budget seemed to get smaller as we got into it, or I was told that certain things that I wanted in the book were not available, due to the budget.

SB: Yeah, twenty-five holograms! (Laughs) I thought that was excessive!

DD: (Really laughs) Yeah, so we decided not to do the holograms! (Both laugh hard)

I was originally given a blank check on this thing, and as we got into it, the blank check eventually got numbers on it. We had to sort of tone down the scope of the design a little bit. And that affected Steve's manuscript in a way. Here's how it was originally laid out:

It was going to be a forty-eight page book, twenty-four pages of illustrations, and twenty-four pages of prose. That's what Richardson wanted. I came back to him after looking at this a little bit, and told him it was going to be far too dense in illustrations to be a true illustrated short novel or novella.

SB: And Mike told us we can't call it a novel or a novella.

DD: Yeah. It turned out, contractually, we couldn't call it a novel or a book. It had to be called a 'graphic story album' because novelization rights were tied up with another publisher.

At any rate, at forty-eight pages it would have been too dense in artwork and prose. I talked Mike into enlarging the book a bit, so that we'd be deal-

ing with *three* pages of prose to one page of artwork. This gave us approximately a hundred page book. At this point they went to the finance department and said "Can we do this?" They said no, you have to do a smaller book. What it turned out to be was the seventy-two page book, with twenty-five illustrations and the remaining pages text. So for every two pages of text, there was one page of artwork.

LH: During all these changes there wasn't much communication with you, Steve. I understand you were originally contracted to write a much longer story. Wasn't the original story about twice the length of what you ended up having to finish with?

DD: Can I interject here?

SB: Yeah, yeah, sure.

DD: During the start of production on the writing, no one sat down and said "This is how much type we can fit on a page. Multiply that by how many pages are in the book, and come up with a word count." Like I said, we were like 'babes in the woods' on this deal, so we were all going under the impression that the word count could fluctuate quite a bit, because we - myself as the designer and Jerry (Prosser) as the production person - had the ability to design the page, and the page count, to fit whatever size text that Steve would be delivering.

LH: And this was before they gave you a specific page count?

DD: Right.

SB: And in my case, there was no page number. My contract, which was negotiated entirely in the abstract, was based on a fare rate of money, which

at that time would be called a novella. And novellas are defined by a certain word count. My contract called for a story no less than 20,000 and no more than 25,000 words. So that was what I was working to. In fact, I think that literally on the last day of doing the polish on the third draft, I was hitting the key on the computer to see how many words I was at. (Laughs) To make sure I was within my word count, contractually. And it had no bearing on the reality of the design. As Dave says, we were 'babes in the woods'. My lawyer negotiated the contract based on an abstract definition of novella. Dave and Jerry were working on a production problem based on *page* count, and never did the twain meet until the final manuscript was in Mike's hands. Then they all realized, "Oh-oh. This isn't going to work!" (Laughs)

DD: Right. What happened was, I sat down and designed the page that I wanted, with the gutter space and the text block in the center of the page. I came up with a type style and size that I was comfortable with, sitting within that page. Once I came up with that, I was able to come up with a word count and a page count that we were able to deal with. This was probably about half-way into the production of the book.

LH: And this was towards the end of Steve's final draft?

DD: This was Steve's first draft. The long draft. When we came down to it, what happened was after structuring the book and coming up with the word count, we compared that to the manuscript that Steve had delivered.

LH: Was this Steve's fin-



ished manuscript?

SB: It was the finish.

DD: It was *supposed* to be the finished draft.

SB: Right. You're right technically, Dave, there was another draft. But that was my fourth, and as far as my contract was concerned, final draft. I won't go into the details, but I did have to do a separate negotiation for a separate payment to cover that additional work. Because the final draft, after three initial drafts, had been accepted as a finished draft. That was at the point where Dave and Jerry worked out that problem, and then there was *another* draft that had to be done. But that was above and beyond what the contract called for. Which had been fulfilled.

DD: Eventually, what happened was, we came to a point where there was no flexibility in the type size. Dark Horse wanted a very specific type size, which at that point limited the word count. Steve had written a story that was 24,000 words, and we came up with a maximum word count for the book of 16,000. So much to everyone's chagrin, especially Steve's (Steve chuckles), something had to give, and it was the text.

SB: Yeah. And I didn't mind that as much as the time frame we were working with. (Laughs)

DD: At this point, approximately three quarters of the paintings had been done, so if there was extensive re-writing and editing to do, then that would've meant the possibility of extensive repainting for the creation of new pieces.

SB: But I don't think you had to touch a single piece that had been finished.

DD: As it turned out, no, I

did not have to change anything.

SB: That's because you and I sat down and figured out where the 'give and take' was. Luckily, the 'give and take' involved those two characters.

DD: Dee and Dum.

SB: Mike and Barbara (Kesel) attempted a cutdown version. They attempted what was a fair editorial stab, of stripping the whole thing down while leaving every character intact. I came in at that point and said, "Look, just leave me alone with this." I think I had a week to ten days, and I just jumped in. It was clear to me that what was expendable, was anything Dave hadn't painted. That included those two characters.

DD: Also, there was some restructuring of things inside the story as well. Not just eliminating things, but restructuring scenes and. . .

SB: And it was all for the better. The story was written in a very cinematic manner. One of the problems that Dave was facing when he was designing the book, after the supposed final draft had been accepted, was the writing style. It was very much influenced by how our generation reads, which is impacted by television and fiction. We can jump around. Our generation of readers have that ability, where we don't need to have strictly linear progressions. You can jump from a character being in one corridor to a character that's on the other side of the building without even needing a transitional sentence. I used that as a suspense device, and as a device for driving the action, so that when Dave was designing the book, he came up with that tag, the little aliens design.

DD: Yeah, the icon.

SB: Which would literally break the action, visually. So I just jumped in. I mention that film aspect, because that's how I approached it when it was down to the wire. One of the filmmakers I most admire is Don Siegel, the man who made *Invasion Of The Bodysnatchers*, *Dirty Harry* and *The Beguiling*. Some great movies. I remember reading that *Dirty Harry* was a two-and-a-half hour movie when he turned it in. Probably a great film, but they had to cut it down, and he just jumped into the editing room. That's the story I had that in my head when I sat down. I'm like Don Siegel, and I've got to do this. And I was merciless. I just jumped in there, and any event or action or bit of character that was not essential to the action and the drive of the book, went. I think the only section that I was still unhappy with was the introduction. I think it's still creaky and clumsy, but by page three it's got its legs enough that you're running with it.

LH: *With all of these changes going on, and all the growing pains you two had to go through, how long would you say the whole process took for each of you, from the conceptualization of the project to completed package, in your hand, fresh from the printer?*

SB: (A long laugh) Twelve years, Dave?

DD: (Laughs hard)

SB: I think it was a little over two.

DD: For my part, I think it was two years and eight or ten months.

SB: Yeah.

DD: From the time that I had started to talk to Mike in earnest, and started getting



things going, to the time Steve jumped on board and delivered his final draft. . . I mean, Steve washed his hands of the project four or five months before the actual book came out.

SB: Yeah. Once I turned in that final edit, the one that reflected fitting the actual format of the book, it was really in Dave's and Jerry's and Barbara (Kesel)'s hands. Really Barbara. Barbara was the hero.

DD: Barbara is to be much congratulated and thanked for riding this book through production and getting it done.

SB: Yeah, actually my hands weren't washed of it, because Barbara was such a diligent copy editor. I remember it got down to the final week and she was still questioning things.

DD: That's very true. We

were still tossing things back and forth.

SB: I had to say, "Barbara, I've thought about *every* word in here!"

DD: She'd be sending me pages to approve on design, and I know she was sending or faxing Steve pages for approval on word or sentence changes. Just very minor things.

SB: But God bless her!

DD: Yes, I agree.

SB: That's what's required when you're doing something like this. And I know you and I discussed this Dave, we really were concerned about the package. We knew what the price was going to be for the book, and we wanted to make sure that people got their money's worth. I think that was a factor in Dave going to Mike and say-

ing, "No. This can't be one story page to one illustrated page." And we talked about that.

DD: That's right.

SB: This had to be substantial. A twenty-five dollar book is a fair outlay of cash in this day and age, and you've got to get your money's worth. And right to the end, Barbara made sure of that. She really made sure that what went out that door was the best each of us could give to it.

DD: I agree.

SB: I'm glad she did that. I'm really glad she did that.

LH: So, the big problem during this project was the change in the length. Were there any other problems you had to face while working on the book that are worth mentioning?

SB: Well, I had problems with the twilight zone periods. And this is not in any way an attack on Mike or Dark Horse, but Dark Horse was going through a major period of growth at that time. I can't speak for Dave, but for me sometimes *months* would pass before I would hear back from them. And usually when I would hear it would be a frantic call, typically on a Wednesday, requiring everything on the Friday. Now, throughout those stretches of silence, I kept working. And every single time I got that call on a Wednesday, I would be able to say, "Okay, make sure your fax machine is loaded." I would fax eighty or ninety pages - a complete roll on the floor when they came in the next morning. But that was really the only other problem. It took a little while to reach our equilibrium as to how we were going to work. I started with one set of expectations, and I'm sure you



did Dave.

DD: Yes.

SB: Part of the reason I completely kept myself out of the design end of it, is that there was a point where it was clear I just needed to write. I just wanted to be left alone and to proceed. And I gave the same space to Dave and the people at Dark Horse, when it came to my job being done. I was very much left to myself. At first that was disorienting, and for a short time it was frustrating, but then became very liberating, because I'd never really had that before. All my prior experiences, especially in this industry has been on team projects. They're designed as teams, so the editor can *fracture* the creative process and maintain control. And that simply wasn't the case here. What really had to happen, and what ended up happening, was with the necessary contact and exchange of ideas I just had to *write* the thing. And as Dave got what he needed, he just had to be left alone to paint the thing. I think at the end, everything worked out quite well. But it really took Barbara jumping in there, to finally take the reigns at Dark Horse and do what they needed to do, at the point where we had carried it as far as we could.

DD: The only major problem, in reality, was the production end of it. Had a lot of thought gone into the production end before Steve actually started the writing and I started the artwork, so that we could have come up with an accurate word count and page design - had the book designed before going into the actual physical production of the artwork and the text - that would have eliminated quite a lot of problems

that we encountered along the way. Now that this project has been done one, and everyone knows where they stand with it, and have learned from it, it'll be easier going on the next one.

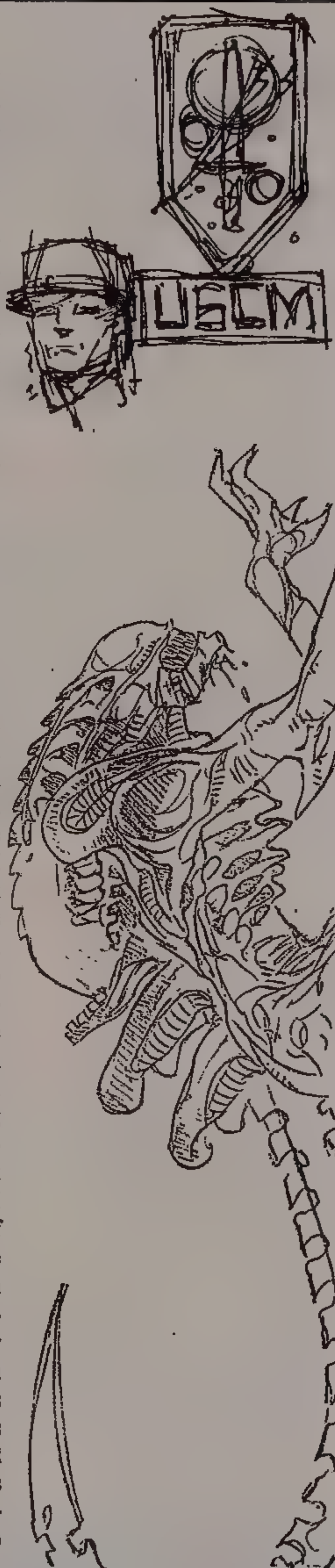
SB: There was one other problem right from the beginning. And it was the first problem I had to solve. How do you write about these aliens, when you're being told that they don't think. (Laughs)

DD: Yeah, that's a problem for you as the writer. For me. . .

SB: Yup, you just had to make sure they looked right!

DD: When I was talking about problems, I was looking at the whole thing, you and I creatively, and Dark Horse as the publisher.

SB: Yes, but for me as a writer, a fundamental problem was figuring out a manner which was not too coy to write about these things. As I look at the books now as they come out, I realize that's the problem that every single writer of this premise faces. And I'll bet you anything that the writers who are doing the Bantam paperbacks are having a harder time than the comic writers are. With comics, you can let the visual action carry you. I was writing a prose novel, first and foremost, and I had to solve that problem. I had solutions that I proposed (to Dark Horse) all of which were shot down, because there is nobody at Fox (the film company) who is the Alien expert. Whenever there's a new film in production, there's a new team in there. When there's no film in production, there's *no* team in there. So I really had to arrive at these cute phrases like, "She spoke without speaking," that sort of thing. (Laughs)



But that's a much lesser problem than the ones Dave and I were facing throughout this, just in terms of work relationship and the production end and the format, and so on. But it was a real problem, believe me. It was a sticky one.

DD: Unfortunately, dealing with a licensed project like this, even though we're given creative freedom, we don't *really* have the freedom, because the company who holds the license is the one who's going to say yes or no. And they're the ones who said, "No, the aliens cannot go above an evolutionary level of a bug intellect." It had to be this certain level, and that was it. So, Steve was definitely very handcuffed into how he could develop the aliens as an integral part of the story.

LH: *All these problems aside, what would you say were the elements of the project you most enjoyed?*

SB: Well, I love writing.

DD: And I love doing the artwork (both laugh), so I think we both enjoyed that.

SB: One of my greatest pleasures was seeing Dave's paintings for the first time. I'll never forget seeing those photographs for the first time! It wasn't just that they were good, it was that they got better. The feeling I got in seeing the progression of paintings, was that it was a real *gestalt* for Dave. There was this leap of vision, if you will, that just went beyond anything I'd seen in his prior work. And maybe I'm being proprietorial about that, but it really looked like there was something that happened with the fifth or sixth painting.

DD: Well, originally, when I had started to do the paintings, Steve was still working on drafts.

There was nothing really concrete, so for the first three or four pieces, they were fairly generic. I wasn't really dealing with any real characters. I was just doing the aliens and the generic stuff. As we got further into the characters and I was getting pages from you with the descriptions of the actions, and eventually when I got the whole story, I was very much rolling with the feel of the story and the characters. As I look in the book at the pieces, as they are now, I can see a development from certain pieces from where they were early on to the later pieces, where I think there's a lot of power to the pieces. I feel very artistically fulfilled by the project. I think every piece in that book is strong. There are some that are of weaker strength, but as a whole package it makes me feel creatively satisfied with what we've done.

SB: Yes, and I do as well. Even the difficult things, that ten days of hell, stripping the thing down at the end. I look back on that and I enjoyed it. It was hellish! And I bitched all the way through it, as Dave will vouch (both laugh), but it really was a great experience all around. I learned a lot, and I do love to write. It was a wonderful game. I don't own it, Dave and I don't own these things, we have an arrangement with Dark Horse where there's an agreed-upon propriety over the original elements that we brought to the story. But it was fun to have this kind of a game board, which is very much what I look at it as. That I really enjoyed.

DD: It's just one of those things where it's nerve wracking and exhilarating at the same time. The end product, when it's finished and finally in your

hands, it's very satisfying, gratifying, to be able to have created this full volume of work from nothing.

LH: *On a more serious note, Dave, I understand that this book had a special meaning for you. Wasn't there a sense of urgency for completing the project because of some problems with your parents health?*

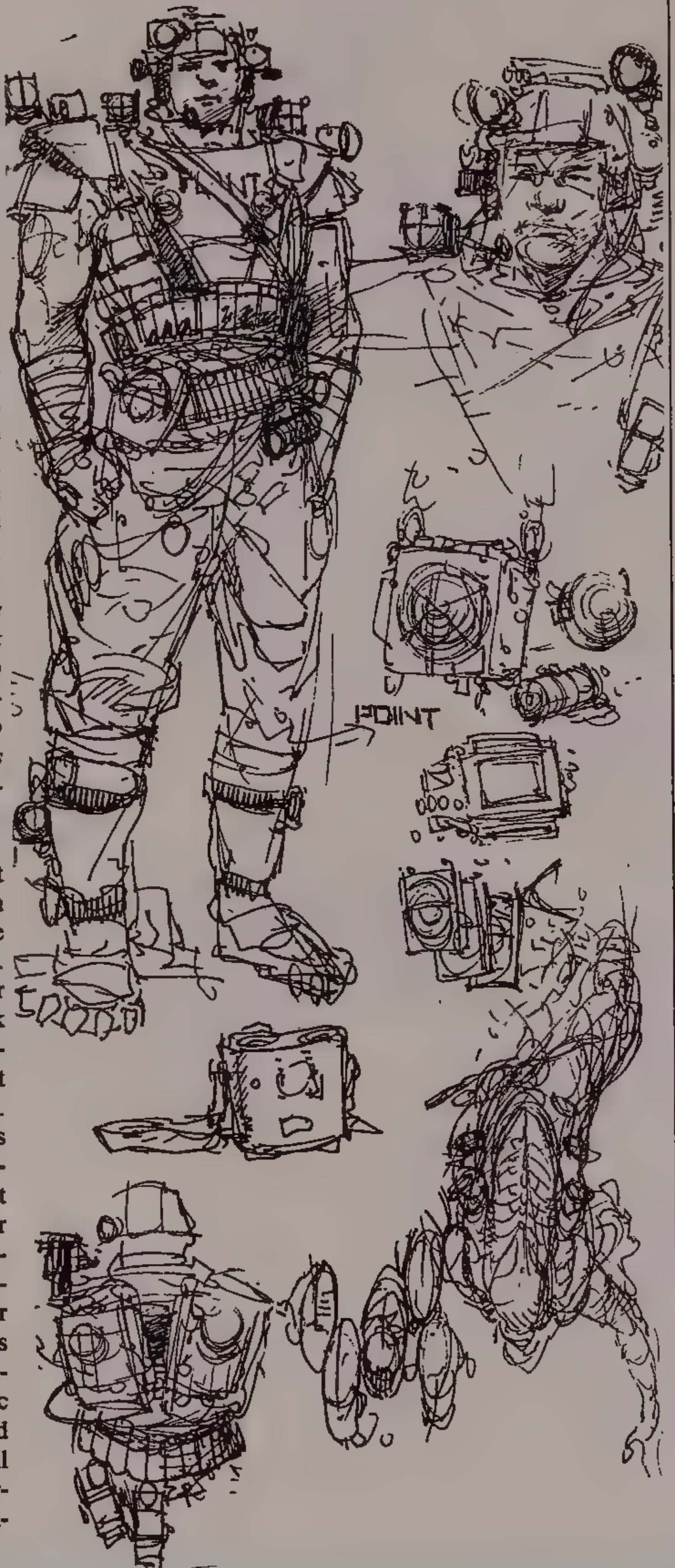
DD: There was a bit of urgency, in that my mother was diagnosed with cancer a few years back, and at that time they hadn't given her very long to live. My folks have always been supportive of my work throughout my career, both when I was in school and when I dropped out to pursue art as a living. And that support was financial *and* emotional. They let me develop in the direction that I wanted to go. There's nothing that I can ever do to repay them for that support that they gave me in letting me develop and establish myself in this career. This particular type of project - an illustrated book - is something that I've been aiming for, for quite a while. Something that lets me showcase a vast body of work, integrating it with the text, and having it in one volume is very exciting for me. It's a direction I wanted to go. When Dark Horse and Steve and I all got together with this, it was very much a culmination of where I wanted to go at that point. I really wanted to show my folks that they didn't make a mistake. Obviously I was making a living before this, with the artwork, but this was something very substantial for me. I wanted to show them, to make them proud of what I was capable of doing. I'm sure they were proud of what I was doing,

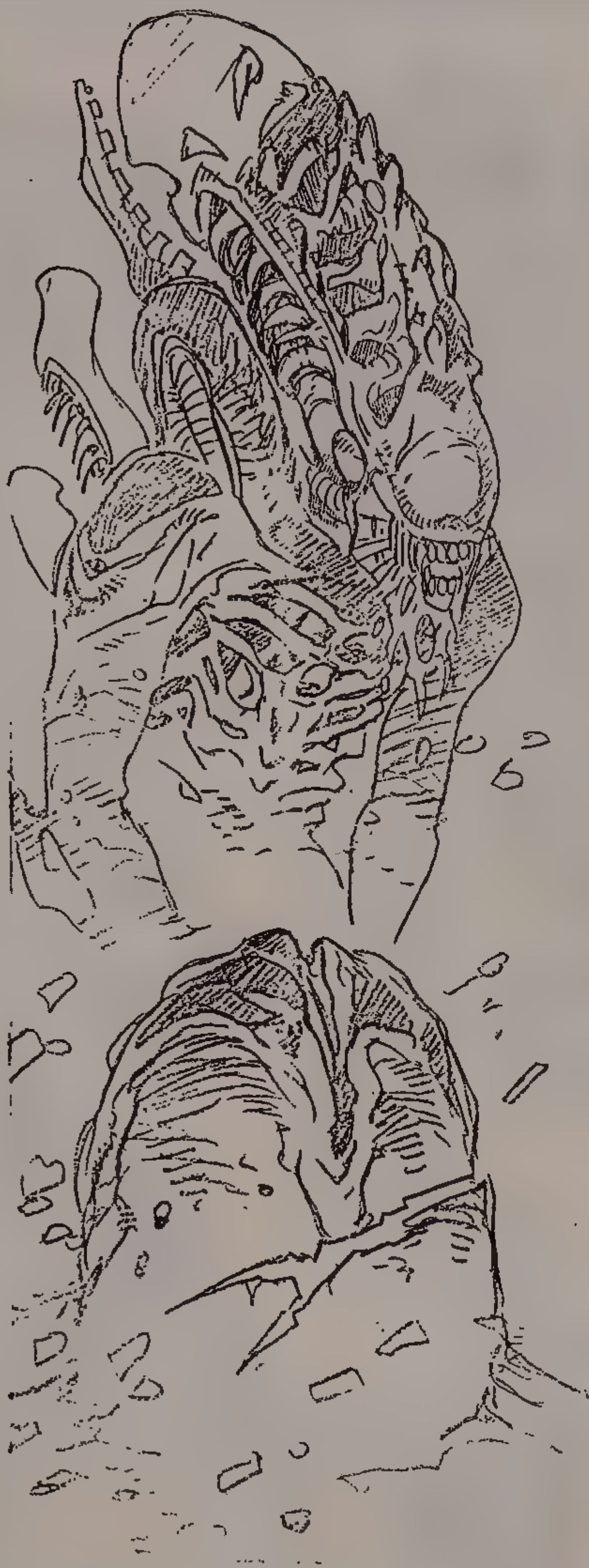
but I wanted in my heart to produced something that would make them proud. And we did. My dedication to the book was to my parents, who gave me that time to develop, and I'm especially happy that my mother is still alive to see this project come to fruition. To see how nice it looks, and how popular it is. That was something very much on my mind throughout this project - that she would stay alive long enough to see this happen. And she did, and we're happy about that! She's still with us, and we hope she'll be with us even longer, but she has seen this project, and she's very, very proud of it.

LH: Well, I hope she's as proud of the trade paperback which is now on the stands. Do you think that Dark Horse adding book store distribution to the direct comic market sales will help increase the popularity of the *Aliens* stories?

SB: Oh, yeah!

DD: (Laughs); Well, at twenty-five dollars, there is a limitation to what an average book-buyer will pay for a book. For a Stephen King or a Peter Straub or a John Grisham book - anyone who's famous - twenty-two or twenty-five dollars is not too much for a hardcover book. But for your average fan of this type of material, it is. By publishing a paperback version at half the price, we open up our market, especially in the bookstore end of it. A lot of bookstore customers are not familiar with the format that the comics are being published in nowadays. And this isn't a comic book per se, it's an illustrated novel. It has the potential to sell very well in the bookstore market, because it's not a 'continuous panel' book. "





LH: What about from the writer's perspective, Steve. Do you think this will generate new interest in the Aliens storylines?

SB: Well, I'm curious to see whether it will or not. We have the benefit - and it was a benefit - of having this first book appear in its original form in the direct sales market. The point is, it's a soap bubble - it's own self-contained universe. Within that world of direct sales market, Dark Horse had built the *Aliens* license into a high-interest commodity. It didn't matter whether the third (*Aliens*) film was good, bad or indifferent. Dark Horse had built its own universe, had its own readership, and that's the readership - the customers, the retailers, the distributors - that Dave and I had the benefit of sailing into on our 'maiden voyage'. Going into the 'real' world, I'm curious to see what happens. In the world of bookstores, and pharmacies, and paperback racks, we'll see how the trade paperback does. There'll be a trade paperback in the direct market as well, but I'm just talking about the bookstore distribution. I wonder what *Aliens* means to that audience, and I don't think anybody knows right now! I know from working one day a week as the advertising and promotional director for Video Superstore here in southern Vermont, that in *that* market the *Aliens* films rent well. But it's not a high-demand thing. It's not in the mind of the public, the way it was put into the mind of the comic buying public. There it was many different series, something to look forward to. I'm curious to see what it does out there. Unlike the direct sales market, where you know how many

you've shipped, that have sold, it'll be another six months to a year before they can gauge the success or failure.

LH: *You mentioned earlier that there were Aliens paperback novels out there, and the problems writers face with those. Do you think that your Aliens:Tribes story album will have to compete with those paperbacks, or will it represent a different type of book and a different type of reader?*

SB: It is a different type of book. It's an illustrated book. Dave has done twenty-five paintings. It's a different beast than the novelizations that are out there. Whether it's perceived as a different beast, whether it's advertised or displayed as a different beast in the bookstore market, is going to depend entirely upon the successful marketing done by Bantam Books. And that will depend upon whether they recognize it as something worth pushing or not. I imagine they will, because there has to be some kind of an investment (by Bantam) into the license. I don't know, I'm just curious. For me personally, I'm overjoyed it's going into the bookstore market. It took considerable thought before I said yes to this project, because it was a work for hire and that is a principal of employment that I have consciously chosen to avoid. In this case it was very good for me, because it established me as a writer - not an article writer, not a short story writer, not someone who writes *about* comics or *about* film - but a *writer*. And once you take people on a ride, a fictional ride, that they enjoy then they'll be coming back or your name will mean something to them. For me it was a step

into a different arena that I very much wanted to get into, so I'm really curious to see what it does in the bookstore market. I don't know. It is *different* from the novelizations that Dave has been doing the covers for, because it is an illustrated storybook. Whether it will be perceived as more, or less, or something different, only time will tell. I'm excited, I'm looking forward to it.

LH: *Dave, is it true you've done a whole new cover for the trade paperback?*

DD: Yeah, there's a new cover. It's a wraparound. Basically there are three elements involved in the cover; there's a basic background element that moves from alien skin-type texture on the front to machinery and metal on the back, then inset on the front cover there's a painting of the queen and a tribe of aliens, and inset on the back cover is a closeup of Kicker's flamethrower and part of his waist armor. It was just some interesting design elements that I put together to give it a different look from the hardcover dustjacket. That was primarily the queen with a few alien drones next to her.

LH: *Will that original cover be included in this trade paperback at all?*

DD: I don't believe so.

LH: *So that gives the hardcover some unique element that will distinguish it from the trade paperback and an added value?*

DD: That's correct. As the dustjacket for the hardcover, that's the only place that piece will be available.

SB: It's also valuable because it is the first edition of a work that, clearly, is going to have a number of editions.

DD: Yeah, the hardback

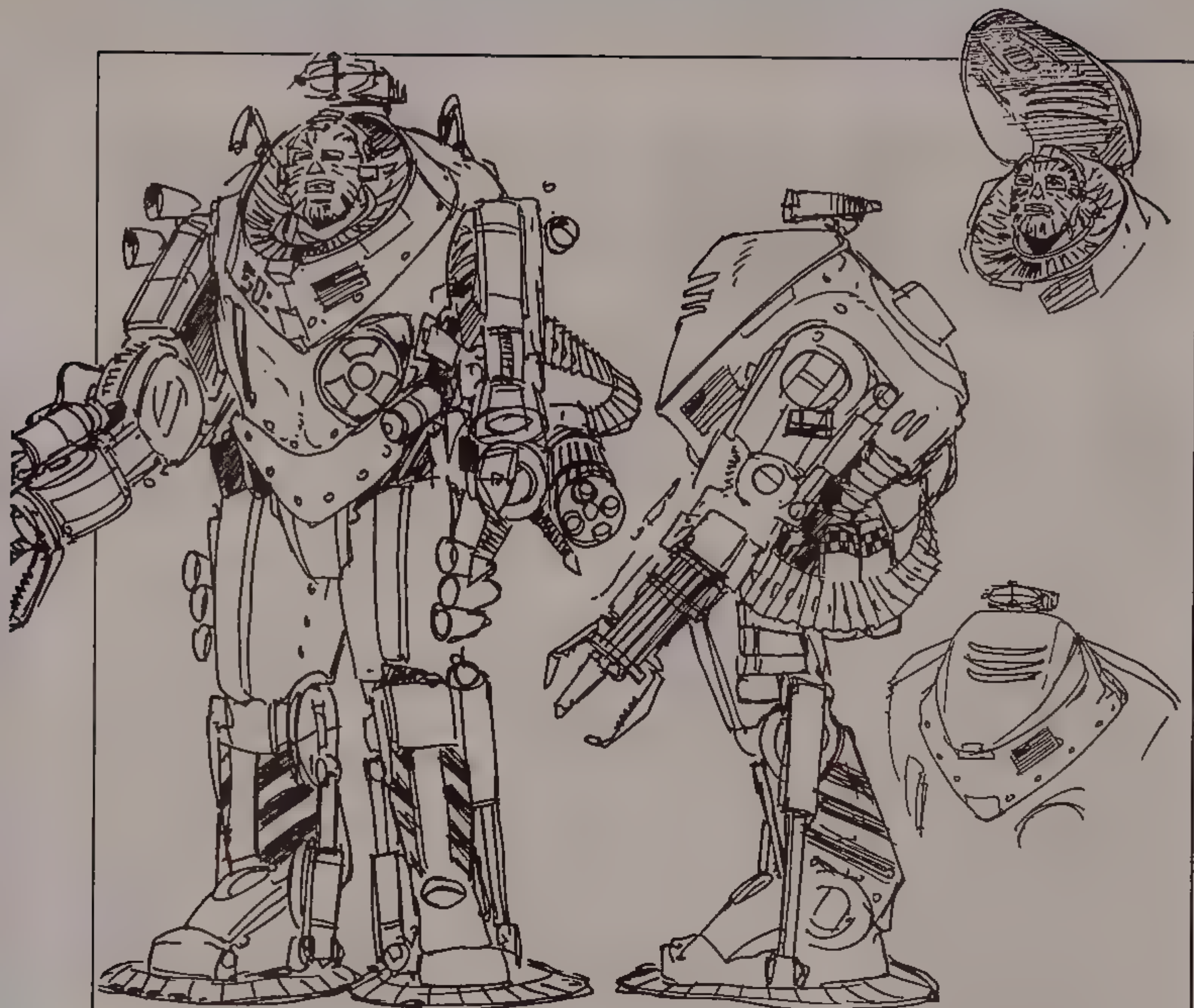
will stay in print even though the trade paperback is available. It'll be available through Dark Horse, and will be of special interest to those collectors who want a permanent addition to their library. That's one of the things I wanted to make sure of when I started this project. I wanted the hardcover to have a long shelf-life, even though the paperback edition was forthcoming.

LH: *Well, here's a question I know all the fans are anxious to hear about. Do you two have a sequel in the works?*

DD: There's the possibility of a sequel. Steve and I have talked about it, and we have talked to Dark Horse about it. I can't say anything more about that yet. . .

SB: Well, I'll say a couple of things. There is a sequel, with a title, and it's a very tight storyline. I've had Dave's and Mike Richardson's input.

One of the reasons I said yes to this was that Dark Horse and I had worked together years ago. I didn't find out until after the fact, that my artwork on a different project - the Godzilla comic - was instrumental in them getting the Aliens license! My artwork had been used as samples. That project went sour for a number of reasons. I've had dealings with - God! - many comic book companies. But to Dark Horse's credit, to Mike's and Randy (Stradley)'s credit, it was the only time in my experience where a project had not worked out - the Godzilla project here - and there was no vindictiveness. There was no scapegoating, we all dealt with it, and at the end we shook hands as friends and said, "Let's work together again, another time. This just didn't work."



So when Mike called me and extended the invitation for *Tribes*, that validated the truth of that, that there hadn't been any hard feelings.

Dave and I are waiting to see a number of things right now. Whether there'll be a sequel, and how soon it'll be happening is very much up to Dark Horse and how things play. But I'm still giving them the benefit of the doubt, in part because of that prior experience. We're both in holding patterns, because Dave and I have talked about it at length, and we're just waiting to see how it goes. But there is a sequel planned in *our* minds, we know what we want to do. Whether it happens or not, time will tell.

LH: If the sequel does come about, will we see any more of Rat?

SB: Rat is not involved in the graphic story album sequel we talked about. Rat is not even a peripheral character. The character *concept* that is continued, which was original to *Tribes*, was the concept of the Berserkers. Very simple, and to my mind, very pragmatic. Once the military would see what a civilian like Ripley could do with a payload, the exoskeletal payload from the end of the second film, they'd have the plans and the drawing boards just cranking! (Laughs) That was the concept of the Berserkers, and the sequel we have in mind - in part because we wanted to do it, and in part because Mike was excited about those characters from day one - features them. That said, Dave and I have discussed a Rat story. Not to any great length or detail,

because we're still waiting to see what happens on the bigger issues of work relationships at Dark Horse.

DD: There's good potential to move in a *couple* of different directions there. We're not limiting ourselves to one graphic novel. Steve and I have talked about the possibility of doing some type of comic book or short chapter thing, like Dark Horse Presents. Eight pages or ten pages over a couple of chapters. That type of thing as well.

LH: Now Steve, if you worked on something like that would you be doing any penciling or artwork on it, or would you stick strictly with the writing?

SB: No, no, really. I very much enjoyed working with Dave, and right now - as I made clear to Dave and Dark Horse -

any future work that comes out of *Tribes*, or the characters in *Tribes*, is really going to be a matter of Dave and I working together. I enjoyed the relationship on *Tribes*, and I enjoyed writing the *Aliens* characters. As an artist, drawing is still something very near and dear to me. It took me eight years to get back to that. I had a five to eight year dry spell where drawing was very painful for me. I enjoy writing these characters. The concepts that were in *Tribes* were very much conceived - on my part, anyway - toward what I perceived as Dave's strengths and interests. That was confirmed across the board by the paintings that resulted. And there's nothing I'd rather *not* draw than a number of Berserkers in a story. With the aliens, yeah, I draw a real neat alien head with the jaws coming out and a little bit of his neck, and maybe a couple of spines. And I can do the hands, but taking on the whole thing...? You know, if I write the story it comes down to the fact that I can write a panel that says, "Forty-five aliens are pouring down on six Berserker's heads." But Dave has to draw it! (Both laugh)

DD: Then Dave says, "No! I don't like that panel! Let's rewrite it!" (Both laugh at length)

SB: No, my relationship with the *Aliens* material very much depends on continuing to work with Dave. I'm happy to be at the keyboard, working with Dave, unless Dave has other ideas or wants to set up another dynamic. Again, that it's work for hire is another important factor to me.

DD: Well, that's a factor for me as well. There's some things that we're talking about with Dark Horse - pursuing se-

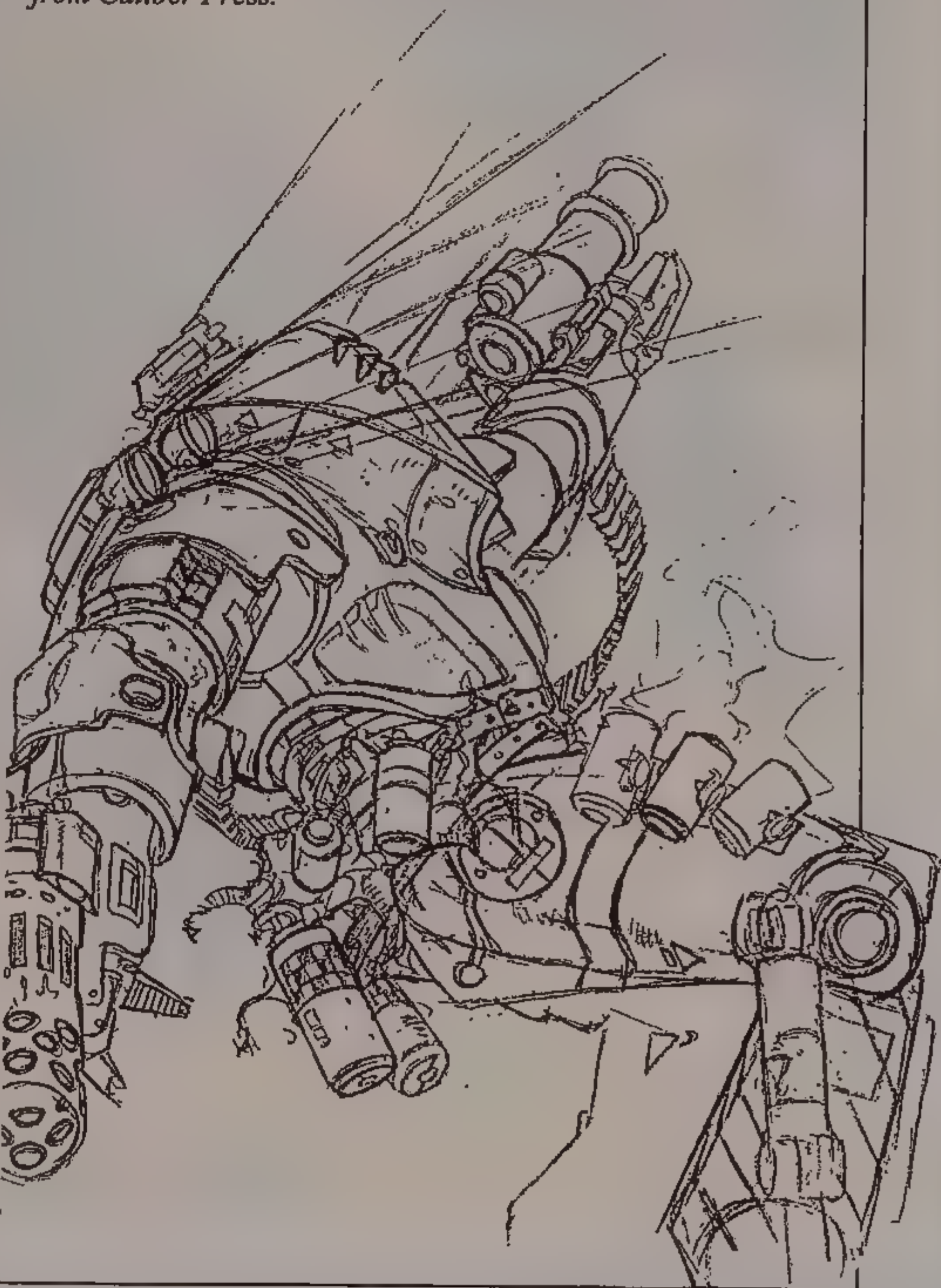
quels, and other things - so basically, just watch the news announcements and we'll see what happens!

Bissette is currently working with Alan Moore and Rick Veitch on 1963 from Image, amongst his many other writing pursuits.

Dorman is busy with a great variety of projects including covers for the next Star Wars series from Dark Horse, the Ultraverse promotional poster for Malibu Graphics, and another illustrated novella, Roadkill: Deadworld Chronicles #1 by Del Stone Jr. from Caliber Press.

Original art from Aliens: Tribes will be displayed in the Words and Pictures Museum in North Hampton, Massachusetts.

To follow is an excerpt from initial drafts of Aliens: Tribes, featuring the characters, Dee and Dum. These characters were ultimately cut from the final draft to allow for an overall reduction in the length of the story. Despite hitting the 'cutting room floor', these characters are both intriguing and dynamic. We are delighted to give you a sampling here of some of what was eliminated from the final version of Tribes.





Dee and Dum marched in step, their Steadiflex pulse rifles in position. Feet, elbows, asses, and rifles pumped in perfect synchronization. In all things - marching, eating, making love - they moved as one. As they arrived at a corridor junction, Leader's voice barked, "Halt!"

Dee made eye contact, smiled. Dum returned the look, and for a moment their eyes locked in mutual regard. If the bughunt was about to get hot, they'd move into position now.

"This is better than sex, lovebirds." Leader's voice crackled over the headset. "Time to grease some crawlers. Dee, you're to proceed down corridor sixteen A to seventeen C, you're to backup Point. He's found an alien entrance to their last reported atrocity, and it's a cakewalk to the hive."

Dee snapped her gum and winked at Dum. "Affirmative, out."

"Dum, you sorry excuse for a grunt, proceed into sector nine. Rat reports a fissure in the flooring, corrosive acid burns the apparent cause. She's closing in on Richards' projected hive site through airlock six-niner-eight G. Lock your viewscreen down --"

Dum flipped his goggles down over his eyes.

Ears' programmed map of the airlock and floor map flared into view, a grid pattern overlaying the corridor he was about to hustle down.

He shook his head to snap into it.

The sense of dislocation gave, and his training asserted itself. His unconscious understood the orientation of the grid to his reality; the video gaming, the training, the sensory-deprivation test and the implant. . . yes, he was *there*. He could see now where he was in correspondence to Rat, and act accordingly with hairtrigger instinct. Anticipation jerked the tendons in his arms.

"Affirm-a-tive!"

"-- and you hustle with new meaning, grunt!"

Dee and Dum gave the high sign and slapped palms.

"Lock and load, move it out," Leader ordered. "Dee, I'll be moving in behind you once we get Shitkicker in position."

Steadiflex rifles at ready, the pair separated, the slap of their boots still meshing with perfect harmony.



Dee fired at the wall-climber, catching it in the ribs.

They shattered, a torrent of gold corrosive spraying through the splintered chitin.

The wounded monster rolled impossibly up the wall, its prehensile tail coiled, and kicked off, slamming full force into Point.

Point's fire careened off the metal, veering crazily to the blistered nursery door.

The pinned alien in the fuselage above saw its chance.

It plunged, talons and jaws spread wide, onto Dee.

She reared back, slamming the monster against the steaming metal, but held it, its arms locked over her chest.

Already she could feel its tail weaving up her leg toward her vitals, and she screamed.

A rope of saliva slid past her shoulder, its jaws were agape, the inner chrome teeth gasping to savor her blood.

Point bellowed and brought his fire to rest on Dee's attacker. Its back exploded, the tail suddenly lashing uncontrollably.

Dee tried to curl into a fetal position, but the arms hugging her wouldn't have it.

As she cocked her head down, the dentured tongue whined past her hear, missing.

Another bolt of fire sounded, a rush of fire flowed down her back, and then she was free of the creatures embrace.



"Point! Talk to me!" Ears bellowed.

Dum stepped up his already frantic pace.

Dee! What was happening?

"POINT!"

Fucking freak.

In his hast to reach Dee, distracted by Ear's cries, Dum failed to respond to the collision course he was on with the Berserker on his viewscreen.

As Dum cleared a hurdle of bodies, the ceiling above him exploded, slamming him to the floor. Slabs of steel and shards of metal and plastic slammed over him as the core of the explosion spent itself overhead.

His ears ringing, Dum crawled forward as another bolt ripped into the adjacent wall. As it blew into the parallel corridor, Dum rolled about

to face the piston-driven madman who stepped out of the smoking ruins.



The pounding caught Point and Dee off guard. They had time to exchange furtive looks before the ceiling above them split asunder.

Both were knocked to the floor by the impact. Point rolled, but Dee took the blast hard, slammed down with bone-jarring force and splashing into streams of alien blood.

She screamed and thrashed clear of the acidic venom, almost lurching into the path of the Berserker as it crashed into the deck.

Shitkicker was a fireball, spitting, shitting, screaming fire in every direction.

His right leg twisted impossibly with the fall, and he plunged into the wall beside him, temporarily obscured from sight.

Dee pulled herself over on her side, every alarm in her wailing.

There was something *on* Shitkicker --

The battering arm rounded the tip of the crater, sprouting pulse-spitting rifles at the center. Fuselage flared overhead as the shots ripped across and down, the nursery door taking the final impact.

Its other arm was bent up and overhead, as if trying to scratch an itch it couldn't reach. But its back was aflame, and something was writhing in that blue hell. The torch was suddenly extinguished, and the arm's electroprod unit jutted from the barrel, catching the pitiful figure that still clung to the exoskeletal spine full in the face.

The figure stiffened with the jolt, then fell, limp and horribly blackened.

Only the steadicam hydraulics that linked rifle to armor identified the carcass as it tumbled into the twisted metal sheets at the juggernaut's feet.

Dee saw it all, her mouth frozen in a ridiculous grimace, eyes blurred red by tears and blood.

Shitkicker knew none of it.

The gnat was off his back, he could focus his ire exclusively on the hostiles, though they were now two floors above him.

The Berserker whirled with terrifying speed and accuracy, and fired upwards.

Dee's eyes were fixed on the shattered body underfoot, but Point caught a glimpse of

Shitkicker's eyes through their slits: beefy, red, fiery.

The creatures began to drop on his exoskeletal armor, tails stabbing spasmodically.

A monstrous sound of screaming metal resounded, and suddenly the crater in the ceiling slammed shut as the flooring above crashed down onto it. The deafening echoes abated, giving way to another discord.

There was a rushing sound in the other corridor, a clambering of armor as the hostile ranks shifted.

Shitkicker quickly dispatched the insects that uselessly lashed out at him, then responded to the changing of the guard.

The sound echoed through the hole he had broken in the wall, from the parallel passageway. Shitkicker turned and glared at Point, and cocked his arms as if to fire.

Then the giant was gone.

Dee crawled hand over hand, like a lost child, to the broken and burned body.

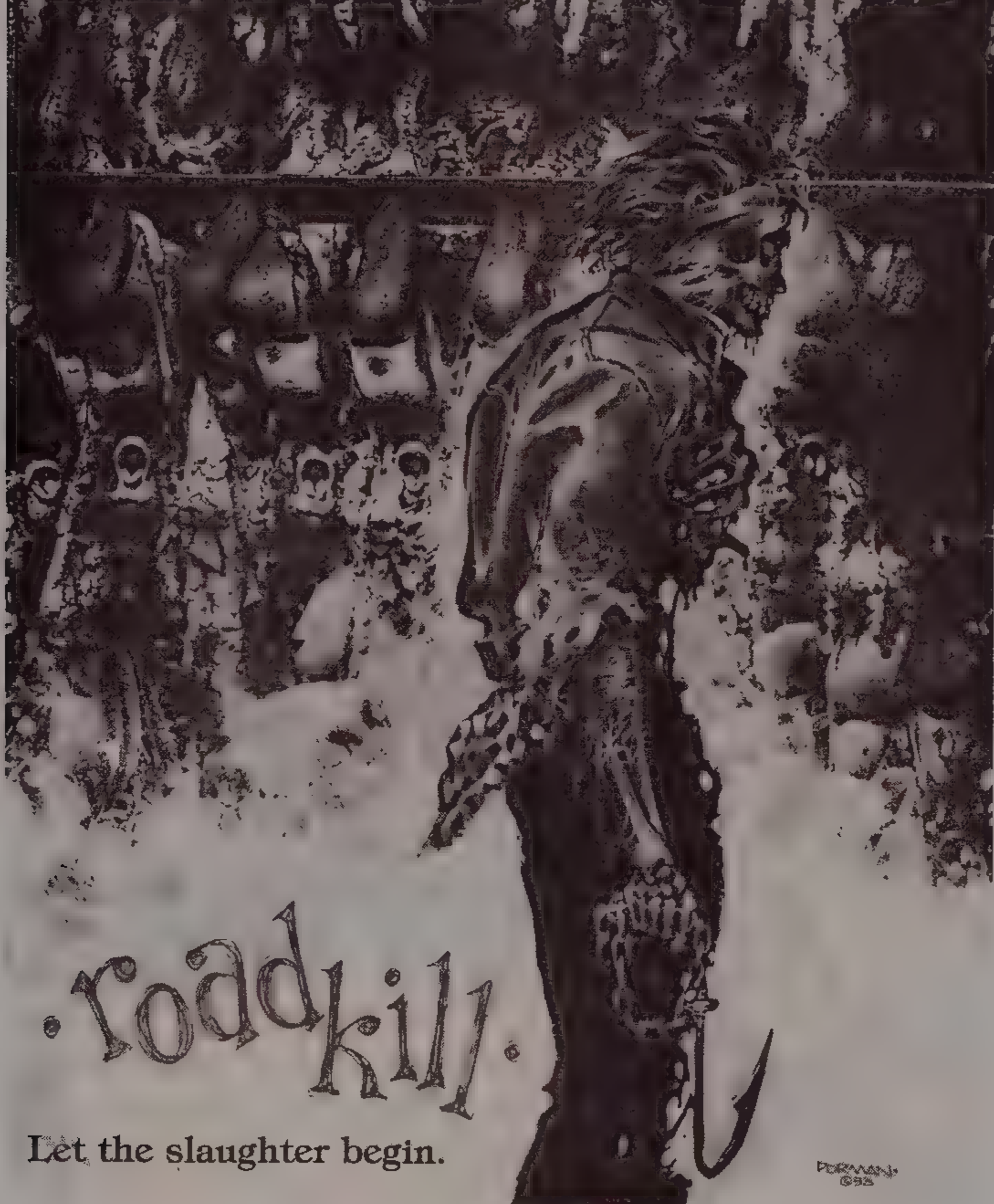
"Dum," she sobbed, cradling his remains.

Point struggled to his feet, letting the wall support him as he struggled toward the open nursery.



Dorman's character design for Dee.

THE WORLD HAS ENDED



Let the slaughter begin.

"The meathook whistles as it arcs through the air, begging a sound in response, the woody thunk of steel sinking into bone, the crack of bone giving way like rotten planks splitting, and the wet squelch of a man's face being torn off."

Regular Edition, \$2.95

Deluxe Trading Card Edition, \$5.95

B&W with Full Color Wraparound Cover

Available in the June solicitation catalogues.

A zomble named Hitch and a woman named Dakota reluctantly join forces to defeat a madman determined to destroy the world.

Roadkill: Deadworld Chronicles #1

An all-new Deadworld self-contained story.

Dave Dorman (*Aliens: Tribes*) illustrates the

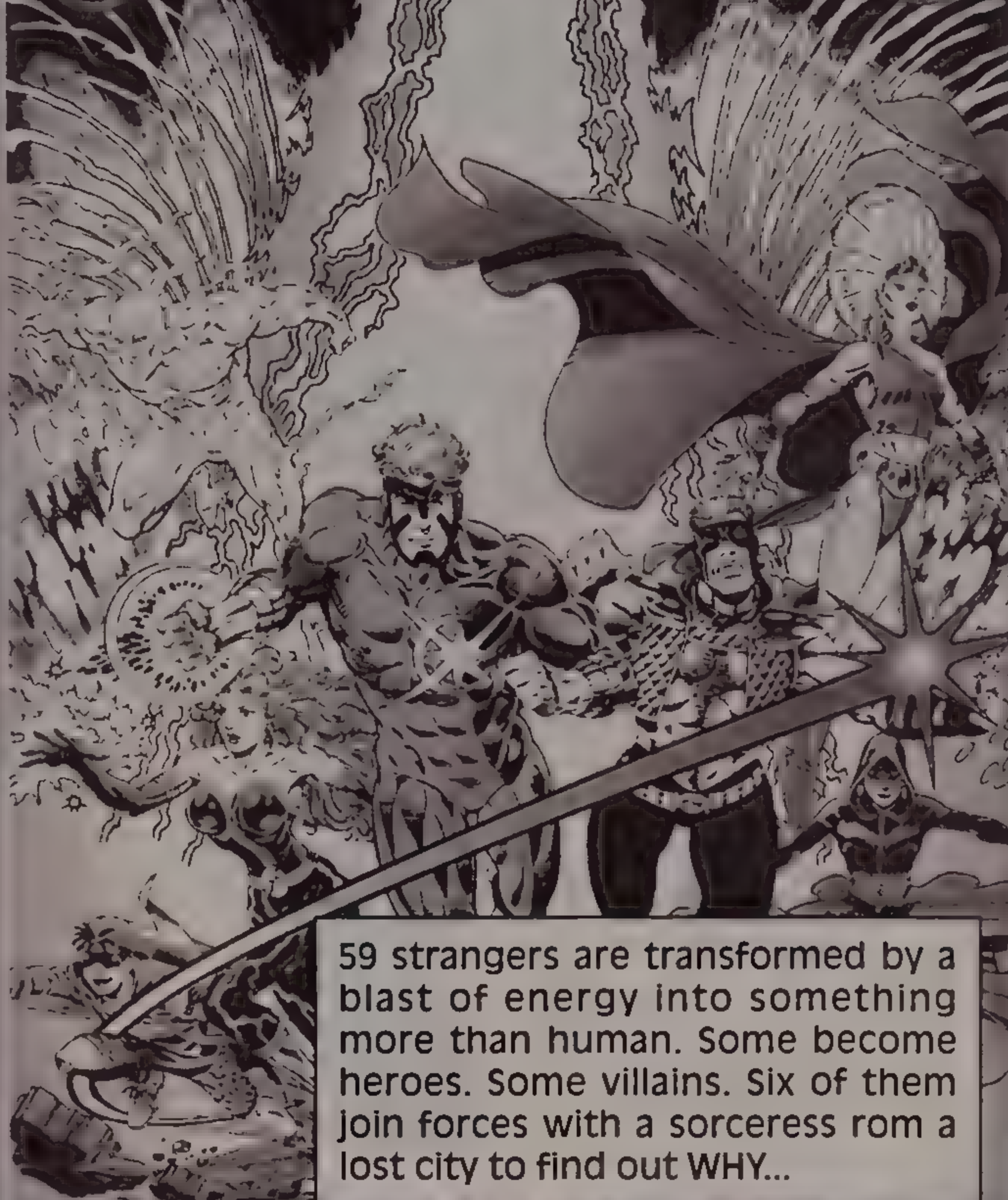
32-page prose story by acclaimed writer

Del Stone Jr. (*Hellraiser*, *Thumbscrew*).

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Published by Caliber Press

THE STRANGERS™



59 strangers are transformed by a blast of energy into something more than human. Some become heroes. Some villains. Six of them join forces with a sorceress from a lost city to find out WHY...

ULTRAVIOLET

Steve Englehart • Rick Hoberg • Tim Burgard

Illustration by Rick Hoberg

June '93

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Comic News FLASH

Triumphant News

That's right! Triumphant Comics—dubbed the "Collector's Universe" by its publisher, Friendly-Personality, and described as "a new line of interlocking science-fiction action-adventure stories" — debuts in July. Boasting the creative talents of Marty Schranz (former Senior V.P. at Wizard) and John Tartaglione (former Staff Art Director at Marvel), this brain-child of FP co-founders Adam Post and Eric Shefferman promises to deliver both quality collectibles and quality stories.

Here's the hype: All Triumphant Comics are sequentially numbered making each issue a unique collector's item. A double-coupon promotion — good for "zero editions" of the original Triumphant series (with names like *Scavengers* and *Vandal* — sounds like some bad seeds) — has also been planned.



Marvel Comics Mega Tour

Marvel Comics will celebrate the fun of reading comics with the kick off of it's Marvel Mega Tour in the Chicago Room of McCormick Place on Saturday, April 24th from 11:00 A.M. till 5:00 P.M..

Presiding over the activities will be Stan "The Man" Lee, legendary creator of the Marvel Universe. Joining Stan will be famed horror and fantasy writer, Clive Barker, who will be on hand to unveil Marvel's new *Razorline* imprint. The *Razorline* imprint was formed by Barker and Marvel Comics to spotlight a full line of superhero comics from the mind of Clive Barker. *Razorline* will begin publishing an initial run of four titles, *Hyperkind*, *Ectokid*, *Hokum* and *Hex*, and *Saint Sinner* beginning in July and promises to be one of the most unique comic publishing projects.

Joining Stan and Clive at the Chicago Marvel Mega Tour stop will be a "Bull-Pen" style gathering of artists and writers from Marvel's various comic titles including creators from *Spider-Man*, *The Punisher*, *The Ren & Stimpy Show* comic, *Barbie*, *X-Men*, and Epic's hot new *Heavy Hitters* line of comics. The event will also feature a slide show previewing upcoming Marvel comics and projects as well as special live appearances by none other than Spider-Man, Wolverine, Captain America, The Hulk, and Nickelodeon's ever popular Ren & Stimpy. Hourly prize

drawings and plenty of free Marvel merchandise will round out the events for the day.

The event is sponsored by Marvel Comics and area comics shops, Chicagoland's Gem Comics, Graham Crackers Comics, Moondog's, Tenth Planet, and Toontown Comic Company. Admission to the event, which is open to the public, is \$5.00 at the door, or \$2.50 in advance. Advance purchase tickets, and details of the event, are available at the sponsoring Chicagoland comic stores.

Andrea Goldberg, Marvel's Midwest Field Representative was extremely excited about the event and noted that "The last time there was a gathering of Marvel talent like this in one place was at the now legendary *Marvel Live At Carnegie Hall* event in the 1970's."



Comic News

AB News

AB Books will be releasing *Baard* #4 in May. In addition, stylish new penciller John Larter has now joined the creative team, adding a fresh, hot new look to the title.

Baard #4 marks a turning point for the title. In a stunning surprise twist, the very foundation of the characters and their own lives are shattered in one swift blow. Stand up and take notice, comic fans! This terrific storyline is guaranteed to trap new readers.

Acid Rain News

Post Alien Invasion Earth Adventure

In a future where Earth is an alien world, one human fights an impossible struggle for survival.



He is *Damlog: the Assassinator*!

Damlog is created, written, and illustrated by European artist Ragne Naess. It is the story of one of the last humans on Earth...an Earth that has been invaded by hundreds of alien species, turning it into a meting pot of the galaxy. Different races inhabit territories or "countries." *Damlog* roams this bizarre world with a price on his head having escaped the mutating and tortuous experiments of alien scientists.

"Ragne's art work is incredible. The painstaking attention to detail is unbelievable and his aliens are outrageous," says publisher Mark Paniccia, "this book will definitely take the reader to another world. You can spend hours looking at the art and keep finding things."

Acid Rain Studios will be releasing four chapters of *Damlog's* adventures in the form of four one shots. The first installment, *Marked for Death*, will be out in April. Three more chapters will be released monthly starting in July.

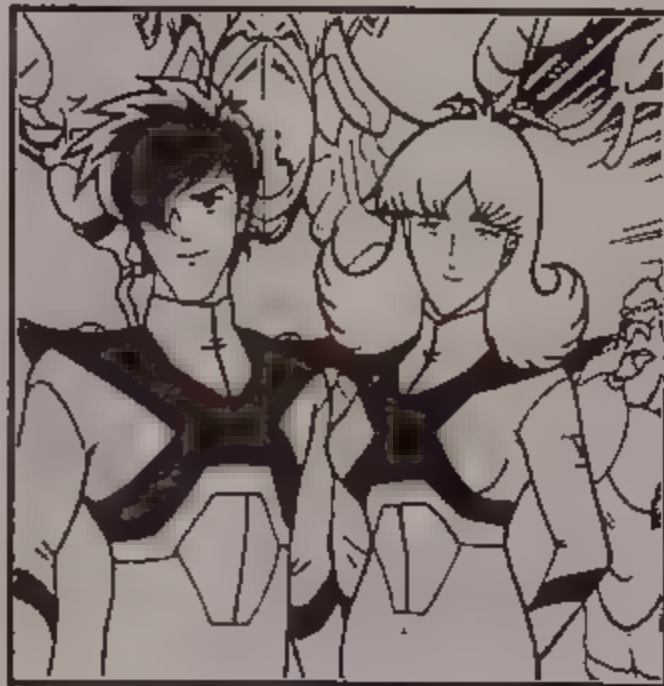
Marked for Death has gotten an excellent response from retailers. Acid Rain believes this is because there's nothing else like it out there. In an industry of "cloned styles" and barely varied concepts, *Damlog* is one book where you'll find something way out of the ordinary.

Robotech Fans in Search of Manga Newswatch #3

Manga Newswatch, a new publication devoted to manga releases and anime, has a special surprise for *Robotech* fans with issue #3. Not only does it have entertaining and enlightening interviews with *Eternity Robotech* creators like John and Jason Waltrip, Bill Spangler, and Tim Eldred, or a history of *Robotech* throughout comics for the enthusiast or back issue collector, or a beautiful color cover featuring the entire cast of *The Sentinels*, but it also has four full-color *Invid War* collector's cards, written by Bill Spangler and illustrated by Tim Eldred. *Robotech* collectors are hunting this one down quick and it's following suit with previous issues as a sellout. #2 contained special *Venus Wars* cards at a limited print run and is still receiving re-orders.

For future issues, look for a super summer preview (#4) featuring updates on Dark Horse's *Dirty Pair* and Marvel's *Akira*, plus info on all the big manga and anime cons. Also coming up is a special *Speed Racer* issue, celebrating his return to television.

The *Robotech Special* (#3) is on sale now.



AC News

Gorby Does Sky Gal



By popular demand, that way-out, wacky winsome waitress wins her own book — *A GGAQ Special* on Ginger Maguire, the Sky Gal. Long a fan-favorite via superb Matt Baker stories appearing in AC's *Good Girl Art Quarterly*, Sky Gal gets a brand new story, the first all new story produced in 45 years! Written, pencilled, and inked by Brad Gorby, "Grem-lins" is Sky Gal at her finest, up against little green hellions intent on keeping Ginger from the man of her dreams (art usual!). All done in the tradition of the original Fiction House version.

Then it's the master's turn in the spotlight with the very first Ginger story, a second never-before, plus 3 more masterpieces culled from the best of the *GGAQ Sky Gals*, all in color. *Good Girl Art* at it's finest...if you like Torchy, you'll love Sky Gal. In addition, there will be an informational piece on the character, and a polybagged edition with a trading card...the first in a set of *Good Girl Art Quarterly Cards* featuring your favorite *Good Girl* characters from the 1940's. Additional cards will be available in future *GGAQ Special Editions* as well as in future issues of the regular *GGAQ* title. Collect them all!

Apple Comics News

Dinosaur Mania Continues

While other comic books duke it out in the great superhero glut this summer, Apple provides you with what the public is really going to be looking for: dinosaurs!

And who better to draw *Dinosaur Rex* than the concept artist for Jurassic Park?

It's true. After Henry Mayo finished *Dinosaur Rex*, he went to work as Steven Spielberg's concept artist for this summer's epic dino blockbuster. So now you'll get to see Henry's designs come to life on paper and on the big screen!

Dinosaur Rex is a rousing tale of adventure, fabulous lost treasure, and the biggest big game hunt of all -- in the deepest, darkest reaches of an Earth where dinosaurs never died and still thunder across the face of the planet!

Hempsted Wallopp is in big trouble. The family fortune has been squandered and his only hope of staving off bankruptcy is to locate his Uncle Grenville, last seen in Africa -- and who clearly does not want to be found.

Armed with much bravado, no experience, and little preparation, Hempsted, his winsome cousin, Flavia, and his mannered servant, Duubadah (an evolved dinosaur with psychic powers) set out on an ill-fated expedition to track down Uncle Grenville and save the family honor!

Dinosaur Rex cleverly combines action, adventure, and hu-

mor and can be read on several different levels. It's full of brawny men and buxom women slashing their way through the grasping tendrils of the jungle in pursuit of the largest, most dangerous game on Earth -- living dinosaurs! But it's also sophisticated, sharp-witted, engaging, well-plotted, tightly-scripted -- and exquisitely illustrated. A tongue-in-cheek tour de force! Written by Jan (Sword of the Atom) Strnad, *Dinosaur Rex* ships in June.



Archie News

New Member Revealed

Yes, it's true -- *Conservation Corps* #2 features the long-awaited debut of the fifth Corps member! "Revelations": At long last, the identity of the fifth Corps member is revealed -- and so is a horrible secret that threatens the entire world! Featuring pulse-pounding pin-ups by fan-favorites Kevin (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) Eastman and Joe (*Green Lantern/E-Man*) Staton!

Plus -- *Conservation Corps* Trading Card Promotion!: If you order a minimum of 20 copies of

Conservation Corps #2, you qualify for one free Conservation corps trading card (there will be six designs in all) – prototypes for an upcoming set! Retailers Only.

Conservation Corps #2 ships in June.



Atomeka News

"I'm on an exclusive contract with Tundra for a year. Seems like it's more a personal thing between me and Kevin Eastman, he's paying me to do what I want and that amazes me!"

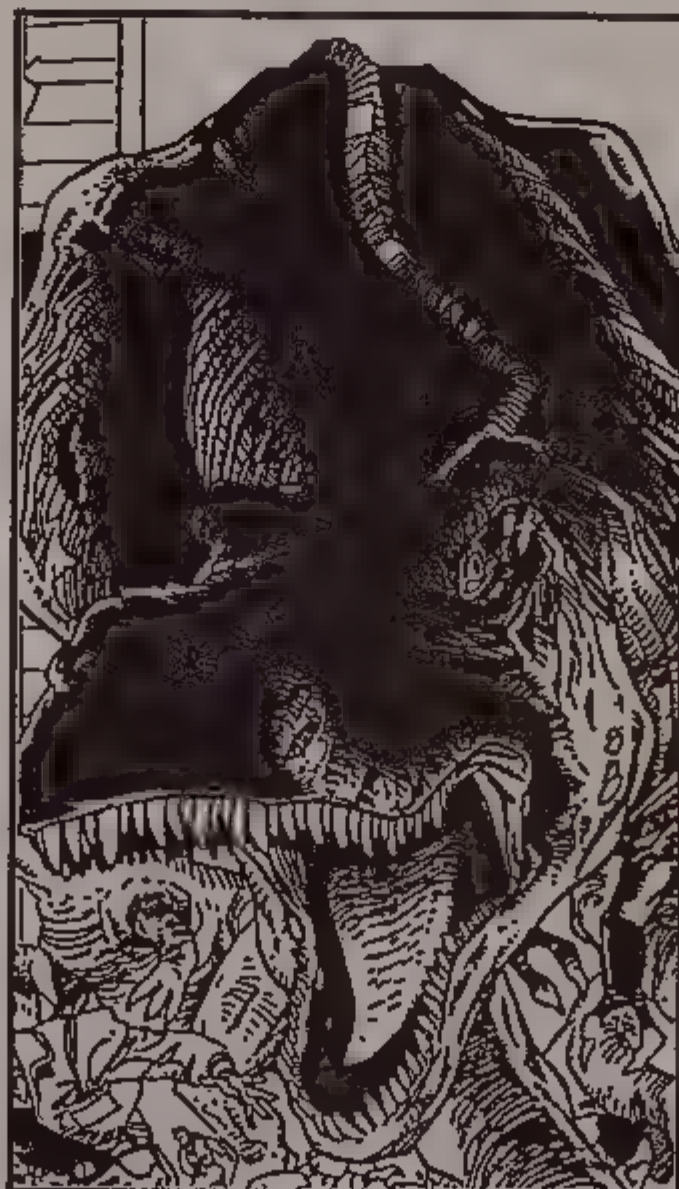
"Initially, all I was going to do was *Melting Pot* and *Heavy Metal*. What's emerging is literally an Atomeka universe. What we're doing this year is creating the backbone from which everything is going to grow. We're not jumping on the bandwagon – we're already on it, and I'm the bandwagon driver. Potentially we've got a whole universe like Image is creating and I'm doing a trading card set with all the characters from the universe for SkyBox, God help me! I'm very

lucky, in that I've been given room to hide away from the mainstream. It gives me an opportunity to develop my style, change it, create characters...and just enjoy myself with a good team of blokes – Dave Elliott and Kevin Eastman, 'cause everyone's very enthusiastic about what they're doing. Good stories, good artwork – you can't go wrong."

- Simon Bisley

Carnosaur Carnage

Monster Massacre. Quite simply the hottest title of '93. Following the success of last month's Mega-Anthology *Monster Massacre* presents *Carnosaur Carnage* – a demented dinosaur blood-bath of beasts and brutality (with a cover by Walt Simonson) to be followed by *Hardware Havoc*, *Necro Nightmares*, and a six-issue *Monster Massacre* series. Also in the works is a Bisley fest: *Mental Chaos*. You can't afford to miss it. There's more - - much, much more Atomeka could tell you. But they have to



have a trick or two up their sleeves. Just keep your eyes peeled. Something awesome is going down.

Bad Blood From The Bad Boys

From their hugely successful series for Rebel Studios, David Quinn and Hannibal King have produced an all-new one-shot for Atomeka: *Nightvision* – Bette Noir.

New York at Carnival – a time when everyone pretends to be someone else. In a sleazy, downtown bar, Blythe finds Bette Noir, a cabaret artist. There is something troubling about the girl – a taste of death that draws Blythe to her. Blythe's *Nightvision* tells her Bette is only pretending to be a vampire. Bette cannot know that Blythe is only pretending to be human.

Caliber News

Dorman On Deadworld

Dave Dorman, one of the premiere artists in comics today, will illustrate the first issue of an all-new *Deadworld* series beginning in June. The series is *Deadworld Chronicles* and will be a series of one shot issues by a variety of creators. Each issue will stand alone and may feature the central characters of the regular *Deadworld* series but is not limited to it. Since every issue will feature a different creative team, the issue will not be num-

bered but carry a separate title. The "Deadworld Chronicles" designation will simply help readers and retailers to identify how series fits in with the regular title.

The first issue scheduled for June release will feature full page art from Dorman in black and white and will accompany the text story from Del Stone Jr.. Dorman will provide a full color cover. The title of the issue will be "Roadkill" and feature a character designed by Dorman by the name of Hitch. Hitch, like the popular King Zombie of the ongoing *Deadworld* series, is one of the few intelligent zombies. This story focusses on an experimental test that will infect the undead and cause them to eat other undead as opposed to living flesh. While this would seem advantageous to the humans at first, it is discovered that humans themselves must be injected with this serum and then killed to be this class of undead. This, of course, puts all humans at peril even though the experiment is supposedly done for the benefit of mankind. Because of the humans natural reluctance to partake in this experiment and the intelligent zombie's realization that this could cause serious concern for the undead's success in taking over the world, the humans and Hitch are forced into an uneasy alliance to stop the experimentation.

Del Stone Jr., the writer, is best known for his comic work on the Clive Barker books for Marvel's Epic line and his teaming up with Lurene Haines in the first issues of *Thumbscrews*. He is well established outside the comic market for his stories which have appeared in many anthologies of both horror and science fiction and is considered one of the rising talents in those genres. Dor-

man of course, needs little introduction to the comic market. Known primarily for his cover paintings and prints, he has also done story illustrations most recently for Capital City Trade Show Gallery and his reception there was very well received.

Caliber plans on announcing other titles within the *Deadworld Chronicles* line but will not schedule any until they are in-house to insure that the books ship on time. The next probable one will be dealing with the re-emergence of many of the prehistoric animals which will be in September or October.

A special edition of Roadkill will come with a trading card as Caliber is beginning to release *Deadworld* trading cards with specific titles. The first release was with *Deadworld: To Kill a King #2* which was re-scheduled for May release.



Equinox Chronicles

This all new mini-series continues the storyline begun in the recent Special Edition (March).

Team Equinox is comprised of five talented individuals who are gifted with abilities and technological resources that set them apart from the everyday populace who are thrust into the limelight of a world desperately seeking heroes. In this first issue, Project Starlight, a top secret nuclear fusion device under development at the Equinox Research Group has been stolen. Shannon Mallory, the brilliant scientist in charge of the project has been kidnapped and forced by the terrorist Black Avatar to convert it into a weapon. The United States is held hostage as the satellites which make up the country's strategic defense network are blasted from orbit. Shannon's colleagues make a fateful decision to rescue her! "A Most Deadly Game" features explosive high tech action as the heroes of Team Equinox confront Black Avatar's deadly forces. Written by creator Jeff Hendricks and illustrated by Thomas Sisneros, Mark Simon, and Tim Roddick. Full color airbrushed wrap around cover by Sisneros and Simon!

Dark Horse News

Comics' Greatest World

Dark Horse Comics marketing director Ronnie Noize announced today that the marketing campaign for the company's upcoming superhero line, *Comics' Greatest World*, is the biggest in Dark Horse history.

"To promote the launch of this new series," explained Noize,

"we've planned an advertising blitz to introduce readers to *Comics' Greatest World*." Key elements of the campaign include:

- Low cover price: These battle-action format comics cost only \$1.00 each ("battle-action format" designates a sixteen-page comic with a cardstock UV-coated cover).

- Guaranteed ship dates: Any one of the 16 *Comics' Greatest World* books that does not ship during the week for which it was solicited will be 100% returnable.

- Printing to order: Each book's print run will be large enough to meet initial orders and advance reorders only, and there will be no overstock and no additional print runs, increasing the collectibility of the books. Dark Horse will be accepting advance reorders until the books go to press.

Noize continued by stating that, "Dark Horse also has an impressive amount of promotional items and retailer incentives lined up." The highlights of *CGW* retail support are as follows:

- Incentives: Retailers who order 100 (one hundred) books each month will receive on squarebound collection of all four issues from each series. The covers of the collections feature foil-stamped icons from *Comics' Greatest World*.

- Point-of-purchase display materials: The special P.O.P. package includes four full-color 10x26" posters suitable for various rack, counter, and window displays, and four counter display header cards featuring each month's *Comics' Greatest World* icon.

- Bonus retailer promotion package: This package includes an ad kit with prepared ad slicks, a press release template, pins fea-

turing *Comics' Greatest World* icons, full-color posters of *Comics' Greatest World*, printed balloons with the Dark Horse Comics logo, plus a new counter display box and four counter display header cards with icons from *Comics' Greatest World*.

- Distributor credit: Retailers may also be eligible for up to \$100-\$200 credit on *Comics' Greatest World* merchandise; interested retailers should contact their distributor for qualification details.

In addition, Noize hinted at "an exciting (but still top-secret!) contest with Topps trading cards, *Hero Illustrated* magazine, and more." A complete explanation of the contest and an entry blank will appear on the back cover of each issue of *Comics' Greatest World*.

Noize concluded: "As readers and retailers are making their choices this summer, they should consider what Dark Horse Comics is doing to make this series the absolute best value for the money. *Comics' Greatest World* has the creators, the characters, the shipping schedule, and the cover price that comics fans are looking for - guaranteed!"

X

Featuring the creative talents of Frank Miller and Chris Warner! Welcome to the first stop in your tour of *Comics' Greatest World* - Arcadia, a city where, if you don't play by the rules, you might be the next corpse. Larry Briggs found that out - right before his insides got sprayed all over the nice walls of his high-rise office. Now the law is looking for the man responsible, and the law in Arcadia is big, thick-skinned, and vicious. But no

one's going to find X until he wants to be found. And when that happens, everyone's going to be sorry.



Pit Bulls

Featuring the creative talents of Bob McLeod and Joe Phillips! You can train a dog to attack on command, to leap for the throat, to have the taste of blood. You can train a human the same way - that's what the government-sponsored Pit Bull Project was all



about. But, even with the most extreme training, humans are less predictable than dogs. And instability can be... deadly.

The government knows that. That's why the Pit Bull Project got cancelled. But that only means the dogs don't have leashes anymore, and they only come out for special occasions.

One of those occasions just came up. The dogs are going for a walk. Don't get in their way.

Ghost

Someone brutally murdered Ghost, and she's not happy about it. She's an apparition with an attitude, a taste for revenge, and nothing to lose. Anyone who crosses her is likely to end up dead. That includes X — he makes the mistake of going after a man whose life Ghost wants for herself. He finds out the hard way that it's tough to crush the bones of someone who doesn't have any, it's tough to blow someone to bits when they have no substance, and it's tough to kill someone who's already dead.



He also finds out that Ghost has some nasty habits. And two of them are Colt .45s.

Monster

Featuring the creative talents of Doug Mahnke and Derek Thompson! Life on the streets of Arcadia is rough enough, but under the streets, it's rougher than anyone could imagine — anyone human, that is! But the sewers are home to rats, refuse, renegades, and a monster... a monster of limitless strength and all-consuming anger... a monster who swats bullets away like mosquitos and tosses two-hundred pound men aside like bags of garbage. It doesn't mean to split the bags apart... usually. Just don't make the monster mad.

Next Men Tour Rescheduled

Dark Horse Comics publisher Mike Richardson announced today that the overwhelming response to the proposed *John Byrne's Next Men* Tour has necessitated rescheduling it to accommodate the massive number of requests.

John Byrne, the critically and popularly acclaimed writer, artist, and creator of *John Byrne's Next Men*, is also widely recognized for his work on *Superman*, *The Sensational She-Hulk*, and *The Uncanny X-Men*. Due to the number of retailers requesting in-store appearances by John Byrne, it has been decided that the tour will be postponed and expanded for fall 1993. Ronnie Noize, Dark Horse marketing director, stated that "the unprecedented interest has afforded us

the opportunity to expand the tour to include even more scheduled appearances."

Retailers interested in a possible appearance by Mr. Byrne in their store are asked to send their requests to:

David Desjardins
Retail Promotions Coordinator
Dark Horse Comics
10956 S.E. Main
Milwaukee, OR 97222

The package should include the following:

- * a letter outlining your proposal for the appearance detailing the contact person, selected quality hotels in the area, and suggestions for an itinerary that is not dependent on fixed dates.
- * a letter to Mr. Byrne, introducing yourself and formally asking for his consideration, which will be forwarded to Dark Horse.

Retailers are also asked to note that stores that were already scheduled for an appearance by Mr. Byrne before the postponement will be given first option on the new tour, and that Mr. Byrne will have final approval of any site or itinerary.

"Retailer response to this tour has been unlike anything I have ever seen before," stated retail promotions coordinator David Desjardins. "It sounds like a John Byrne tour is something fans have been waiting for."



Devil and the Dark Knight

A deadly encounter becomes an historic meeting in Matt Wagner's *Batman/Grendel*, an eagerly-awaited epic miniseries that is sure to fly right off the shelves.

Pitting the relentless determination of the World's Greatest Detective against the diabolical methodology of the world's greatest master criminal, *Batman/Grendel* chronicles the meeting of DC's Dark Knight with the original incarnation of Wagner's now classic creation, Grendel. While Bruce Wayne and Hunter Rose play power games in Gotham's high society, Batman finds himself up against a new and vicious foe of uncanny intellect and evil intent, one more than capable of testing the Dark Knight's formidable skills to their limits.



Batman/Grendel is co-published by DC Comics and Comico, the Comic Company. DC's track record with intercompany crossovers has been phenomenal; DC/Marvel's *Crossover Classics*, as well as DC/Fleetway's *Batman/Judge Dredd: Judgment on Gotham*, and DC/Dark Horse's *Batman Vs. Predator* all have been outstanding commercial successes, and *Batman/Grendel* has the added distinction of being an historic first for the comics industry, marking the first time that an intercompany crossover has been done with a creator-owned character.

Batman/Grendel is compellingly written and exquisitely illustrated by Matt Wagner, who wowed audiences last year with his 3-part story "Faces" in *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight*. Wagner is the creator/writer of *Grendel* for Dark Horse, and also the writer of the Vertigo series *Sandman Mystery Theatre*. He is also working on an upcoming *Doctor Mid-Nite* miniseries. Ships in June.

New Titans Milestone

"The Darkening" reaches its dramatic climax in a landmark 100th issue that's augmented by a holo-foil enhanced cover.

New Titans #100 is a sensational starting point for new readers. Says Titans editor Rob Simpson, "*New Titans #100* is the start of a new era for the series. We have lots in store for the future, and this epic chapter in their exploits is only the beginning of the next great phase in Titans history."

With artists Tom Grummett and Al Vey, writer Marv Wolfman brings a violent con-

vergence of old foes and secret agendas that comes to a head at the wedding of Nightwing and Starfire! Back from beyond the dead, an evil Raven is revealed as the orchestrator of the disasters the Titans have experienced in recent months. While Raven attacks Starfire, Nightwing battles Deathwing, his malevolent future self from the year 2001, resulting in a number of shocks and surprise plot twists that will redirect the series. *New Titans #100* also features the team's "new" member, Arsenal, and special guests like Robin, Flash, and Aqualad. Plus, some of the top names in comics supply the issue with a pin-up section. Ships in June.



The Ragman Returns

By popular demand, the Ragman is back. *Ragman: Cry of the Dead* features the return of Rory Regan as he confronts a malevolent demon. Investigating a series of grisly murders in New Orleans, Ragman is led beyond the realm of mere human

crimes to battle a spirit called Marinette, a voodoo god of vengeance spurred by the restless souls of murdered children.

The first Ragman miniseries received enormous critical acclaim for its portrayal of a reluctant hero who becomes an instrument of justice. Now, *Ragman: Cry of the Dead* takes a closer look at the forces driving Rory Regan, as he learns more of the mysteries surrounding his suit of souls.

Ragman: Cry of the Dead is a chilling story by Elaine Lee, known for her work on *Starstruck*. The evocative artwork is by Gabrielle Morrisette, who has worked on *Deathstroke*, *the Terminator* and *Team Titans*. Cover artwork is supplied by the acclaimed Joe Kubert, co-creator of Ragman. Ships in June.

FantaCo News

Clive Barker Trading Cards

FantaCo has announced they will be exclusively releasing Clive Barker Art cards based on paintings and drawings that recently sold for thousands of dollars at Soho's Bess Cutler gallery. The mass media covered event featuring all original art, some of which has been used in popular books and films from the world renown author/artist.

"There were calls from people viewing the coverage on CNN, buying the art in back of Clive while he was being interviewed!" states FantaCo's production manager and designer Jim Whiting.

"It was a total madhouse! Clive's art has taken off in a big way, and it was great that he settled on FantaCo to handle the card set. We are working closely with the Bess Cutler to make this set a unique item. We've always attempted to handle all of Clive's projects with a sense of where he's coming from and the boundaries and buttons he's interested in pushing. This trading card set will be the crowning touch on all of the Barker projects we've done so far."

The *Clive Barker Trading Cards* will be available in three formats: the regular edition containing 50 cards with 6 subsets pertaining to books and films, the second is an extremely limited set containing a 7th subset of unpublished art designed for the set with one of the cards autographed by Clive Barker. The third is the rarest of all, uncut sheets signed by Barker that will be limited to specific number set by Barker!

Milestone News

She's Fifteen and Pregnant – And a Hero

In a heroic effort to present comics that more closely resemble contemporary situations, Milestone Media, Inc. will tackle the issue of teen pregnancy in an upcoming comic book.

In *Icon #4*, the title character's 15-year old sidekick, Rocket, discovers that she is indeed pregnant. Rocket must now find a responsible remedy to her own earlier mistake. "The story's title

is 'Mom's gonna kill me,'" says Milestone's Editor in Chief Dwayne McDuffie, "to underline the idea that Rocket must make a very difficult, adult decision while she's still a child herself – one who must answer to her own mother."

Icon, Rocket's superhero-mentor, must also take a stand. "Should he treat Rocket as the child she is, regardless of her adult problem?" asks McDuffie. "This isn't your typical superhero story. Our heroes will bring the strong moral center of their superheroic exploits into play to tackle some difficult real-life ideas such as safe sex and abortion, too, in between tackling bad guys."

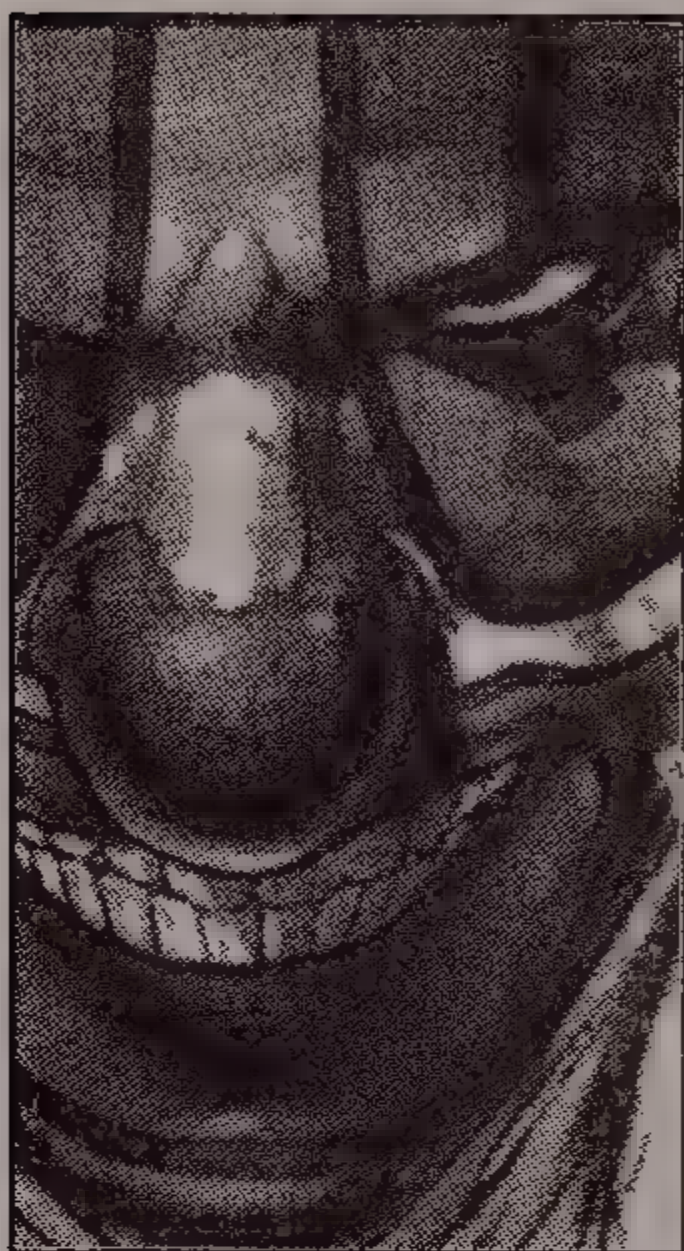
"This is new terrain for mainstream comics," says Milestone President Derek T. Dingle, "but it's perfectly acceptable to a more general audience. This sort of issue-oriented story is common on prime-time TV. We don't plan to 'poison the minds of America's children.' We plan to entertain our readers."

Icon #4, written by McDuffie with art by M.D. Bright and Mike Gustovich, will be available in late June.



Fleetway News

Nobody Laughs At The Clown



Criminals are a cowardly lot, and what better way to strike fear into their shriveled hearts than the image of... A Clown?! Even those pure of heart find something quietly disturbing about a man in baggy pants and a ruffled collar!

The Clown was such a happy fellow, working at the circus with his beloved pony Toby, who's higher math skills not only entranced the paying customers, but could also be used to count the receipts at the end of the night! Then, one fateful evening as the Clown went into town for a few beers, ruffians entered his wagon, stole his money, and (gasp!) killed Toby! Upon returning, the Clown was greeted by a lifeless pony head staring at him. Needless to say, this Clown's not laughing! But then, neither will the victims of his terrible vengeance!

Written by Igor, with by the wonderfully odd Robert Bliss, *The Clown* is unlike any circus-tale ever told. This is a buffoon with a bad attitude, pushed over the edge by the death of his young horse! A Dark Bozo, ready to walk through hell to find the ones responsible and make sure they never laugh again! An Eccentric story to be sure, both silly and desperate, yet ultimately shocking.

The artist Robert Bliss is from the Simon Bisley school of excess, and will undoubtedly be the next great UK import, so order accordingly — you won't be sorry!

The Coming of Finn

In ancient times, man, woman, and animal existed in blissful peace. But then came the Newts — beings of other-dimensionality that declared civilization on Earth. The virus called "speech" spread quickly, misunderstandings turned to fighting, fighting turned to war, and to even more control and civilization.

In the fight between order and chaos, order has always gotten the better press! Again, this is the work of the Newts, who have infiltrated our world, making sure women are always powerless and men are forever in conflict. Into this alien scheme comes a band of witches who decide the time to return Earth to its original harmonious state — by any means necessary!

Their champion (or head assassin, depending on who's point of view you take) is a British cabbie named Paul, who's mystic animal name is "Finn". Trained in the ancient occult arts, he can wrap himself in shadow, com-

mand animal and insect to do his bidding, and is pretty handy with automatic sub-machine guns! He is Finn the Animal, ready to bring down the alien order and bring the world back into balance, and kill as many Newt toadies as he can!

Once again, the twisted brilliance of Pat Mills is showcased as this modern-day witch splits his time between battling gods and working as a cab driver. Hey, god-fighting does not pay all that well!

Fragile Elite News

Grey Legacy Gets Grant

In the fall of 1992 the Xeric Foundation, a nonprofit organization established by Peter Laird (co-creator of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), awarded a self-publishing grant to Wayne Wise and Fred Wheaton, partners in the Fragile Elite Studio. The award was designated for the printing and distribution costs of publishing *Grey Legacy* #1, as per the Studio's proposal.

The Fragile Elite Studio first published *Grey Legacy* in minicomics form beginning in 1990. Starting with number zero, Wise and Wheaton chronicled the adventures of a group of exceptional students at the galaxy's largest university. The series, which lasted four issues, received praise from the minicomics self-publishing network as well as from comics professionals to whom Wise and Wheaton had submitted it.

Now, following in the tradition

of comics self-publishers such as Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), Dave Sim (*Cerebus*), and Wendy and Richard Pini (*Elfquest*), the Fragile Elite Studio is embarking on a long-term commitment to the art and entertainment medium of comics. Wise and Wheaton have been developing the characters and stories of *Grey Legacy* for nearly a decade, and they intend to write and draw the exploits of Greylock, Lesterfarr, Bilmar, and the rest for many years to come.

Wise and Wheaton have designed their comic book as a serialized "generational novel," tentatively broken down into five "books". Each issue will feature a story of stories which, though self-contained, will also be chapters contributing to the greater work entitled *Grey Legacy*.

Issue #1 reintroduces the cast of the *Grey Legacy* minicomic: Lesterfarr, a neurotic university freshman; Taija, the object of Les's unrequited love; Bilmar, an alien lifeform with little impulse control; and Greylock, the mysterious title character of the series. It is Greylock and his unique effect on everyone around him which will propel *Grey Legacy* from the college setting of Book One into the wider, wilder universe.

Harris News

The Badge of Chaos

A tale as current as today's headlines: Vampirella stalking violent cops who hide behind The Badge of Chaos. A young

friend of Vampirella's is savagely attacked by the police. Vampirella investigates to discover the sinister motivation of the officers involved, and the harsh realities of life patrolling the streets of Washington, D.C.. Special guest appearance by Bill and Hillary Clinton. *Vampirella* #8 has a story by Frank Lovece, author of Marvel's *Hokum and Hex*, and art by Jeff Parker and Bo (Viking Prince) Hampton.



Gross Imprint News

Blackwatch, More

The big news this month is Daerick Gross's *Blackwatch*!

By now, you've already heard a few rumors about this incredible comicbook. The rumors are true. It's a six-issue mini-series that centers on what it might really mean for a superhero to contract AIDS!



Blackwatch is a comic book by Daerick Gross, Martin Powell, and John Stanisci that is simply not to be missed.

Compared to the importance of *Blackwatch* everything else Heroic has planned for July seems somehow frivolous, however, there are some other items of note.

Daerick Gross's *Murcielaga She-Bat* #4, Baboso is back with an all-new scheme, and Mister No stars in a new solo adventure.

She-Bat Anniversary

Gross Imprint has announced that in an effort to make the upcoming fifth anniversary issue of Daerick Gross's new *Murcielaga She-Bat* as affordable as possible to comic book fans, the previously announced price will be lowered to \$2.75! That's more than a thirty percent reduction, with no less than 34 pages of story!

Also, while some of the details remain to be worked out, current plans call for one copy of *Murcielaga She-Bat* #3 to be shipped free of charge to every

comic book retailer who has an account with either Capital City Distribution or Diamond Comic Distributors. In this way, Gross hopes to impress upon comic book retailers the fact that good comics — the comics fans buy because they want to read — can still be done without all the gimmickry and hype.

This effort to make the fifth anniversary issue of Daerick Gross's *Murcielaga She-Bat* as widely available as possible comes as a direct result of the fact that the first two issues were so grossly underordered by retailers who didn't understand how much in demand they were going to be. In consequence of that, those first two issues exist in quantities of less than 3,000 and 5,000 copies, and are now commanding price of as much as \$10 and \$5 respectively — prices that can only go up as demand for *Murcielaga* continues to increase.

With story by Martin Powell, interior artwork by Statema, and a fabulous painted cover by Statema and Gross, *Murcielaga She-Bat* #3 will celebrate the fifth anniversary of her first appearance with an all-new, booklength origin that will make this issue an instant collector's item!



Kitchen Sink News

New Mark Schultz Collection

This is the collection you've been waiting for.

It's award-winning artist Mark Schultz's third big *Xenozoic Tales-Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* collection — this one reprinting stories and art that have won three industry awards.

Kitchen Sink is calling the 3rd *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* collection *Time in Overdrive*, and they're releasing the softcover just in time for all the publicity surrounding *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* and the release of the new movie *Jurassic Park*, which will certainly bring dinosaurs to the forefront of popular culture this summer.

Time in Overdrive is a 128-page trade paperback retailing for \$14.95. In addition to the stories inside, the book will feature an introduction by William Stout, one of the greatest dinosaur artists, and pages from Mark Schultz's sketchbook.

Time in Overdrive reprints *Xenozoic Tales* #9, 10, 11, and 12. During that run of books, Schultz won one Best Artist award (the Harveys), *Xenozoic Tales* #11 won a Best Single Issue award from the Harveys, and the Eisner Awards named *Xenozoic Tales* best black-and-white comic book series.

The book reprints eight stories by Mark Schultz and Steve Stiles, including "Last Link in the Chain," "Lords of the Earth," "Primeval," and "Two Cities."

These great stories trace the ongoing history of the City in the Sea and the Land of the Wassoon, with heroes Jack Tenrec and Hannah Dundee. Mark Schultz's fascinating stories and his fabulous art are in top form in these books, and Stiles' art illustrating Schultz's back-up story scripts is lively and terrific.

This July, it's *Time in Overdrive* — a great book that's going to sell like crazy! If there is one graphic novel you need in your store this summer, it's this one!



Malibu News

Breyfogle on Prime

In Malibu Comics' new Ultraverse, Jason is a normal 13-year-old boy with one minor difference — he has the ability to transform himself into Prime, the strongest ultrahuman alive. Jason and his alter-ego Prime will be brought to life by artist Norm Breyfogle, recently signed as penciller/inker on the *Prime* series, written by Len Strazewski.



Mounts Joins Ultraverse

An Ultra-colorist joins the Malibu team! Paul Mounts, known for his work on Marvel and *X-Men* trading cards, has signed on to do color design for Malibu's Ultraverse titles. Mounts said, "I'll be doing my best to add atmosphere and excitement to the Ultraverse books." Editor Chris Ulm said, "Paul's got a very rich, full style. We're really excited to have him on the team." Mounts will also be coloring Malibu's Ultraverse trading cards for SkyBox.

Mounts has worked as a freelancer for Malibu for the last five years. Ulm said, "He's probably colored more than 200 covers for us." Though unsure of the exact number of covers, Mounts said, "I think I've done at least one cover for almost every title Malibu publishes." Recent covers by Mounts have been on *Protectors*, *Dinosaurs For Hire*, and *Ninja High School*.

The Ultraverse is a fresh concept to Mounts. "It's nice to see a universe that's thought out," he said, "with as much attention paid to the writing as to the artwork. It's not just an image-related company." Due to the distance between Illinois and California, Mounts will not be joining the softball team.

Watch out for Mounts' work on *Prime* #1, coming out in June from Malibu Comics!

Protectors Universe Heats Up

June is a busy month for the Protectors with the return of Miss Fury in *Protectors* #10, Ferret's

struggle for life in *Ferret* #2, and Man Of War's family feud in *Man Of War* #3!

Miss Fury, who first appeared in her own mini-series in 1991, will join the Protectors for a three-part story arc starting in *Protectors* #10. The grandson of the President has been kidnapped by Black Fury, an old adversary of Miss Fury. "Miss Fury shows up with information that she thinks can help the Protectors save the President's grandson," said Mann. The Protectors are just back from their adventure in Wisecrack's dimension, and barely get time to relax. Man Of War and Ferret are away, dealing with their own problems in their own mini-series'. Mann said, "With Man Of War in Cuba, it's up to Amazing Man to lead the team — unfortunately, Amazing Man is not quite the leader that Man Of War is."

"Everybody dies... but only a few of us ever really live," Ferret has been known to say. But he is not yet ready to die and continues his search for an antidote to Toxin's potentially fatal poison in *Ferret* #2! After being injected with Toxin's poison, Ferret has 24 hours to find Toxin or someone who can give him an antidote. Ferret may get some help from Midnight Blue, a new *Protectors* universe heroine. "Midnight Blue was first seen in *Protectors* #6," said editor Roland Mann. "She was in the armory pages in the back of the book." Midnight Blue's wrist launcher will be one of the weapons made into a *Protectors* toy, coming soon from Toy Corporation of America.

Man Of War #3, also coming in June, shows the conclusion of Man Of War's trip to Cuba to recruit another member for the Protectors team. His recruiting

and Gerard Jones.

Ultraverse editor Chris Ulm said, "Norm adds another dimension to this project. He has an in-your-face storytelling style that works perfectly with Prime."

After discovering his abilities, Jason finds it hard to fit in with his school buddies. It's very difficult for him to get excited about baseball or video games after he's defeated a madman with plans of world conquest. Breyfogle likes the freedom of the Ultraverse. He said, "It's got a solid foundation that's very consistent throughout the titles, yet it's not confining. We have consistency and freedom at the same time."

Breyfogle is a veteran of DC Comics who worked on *Detective Comics* featuring Batman for several years. "We're glad to have him," said Ulm. "He's a great artist, and Norm has taken to *Prime* like a duck to water."

The Ultraverse is Malibu's new line of inter-related super-hero titles. The first monthly *Prime* is scheduled for June '93 release.

may not go as planned when he runs into Fracas, a mercenary for hire who is more than just a bad guy. "Man Of War fights his long-lost brother Fracas," said Mann, "in a war that goes way beyond sibling rivalry." *Man Of War* co-writer Tom Mason said, "Readers should not miss the conclusion to this high intensity, high emotion and very shocking mini-series."



Marvel News

Hulk 2099 Premieres In 2099 Unlimited

Following the success of the *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man Unlimited* series, Marvel Comics will launch a *2099 Unlimited* series beginning this May. The first issue of this quarterly series will introduce the Hulk of 2099 in a story written by Gerard (Wonder Man) Jones and illustrated by Dwayne (Cage) Turner. *2099 Unlimited #1* will also feature a backup story spotlighting *Spider-Man 2099* and the all-new

menace of Mutagen, by Evan Skolnick and Chris Wozniak. As with other *Unlimited* series, *2099 Unlimited* will consist of 64 pages printed on fine 'Fanfare' stock.

The introduction of the Hulk of 2099 spotlights this powerful new character and begins to weave the mystery that surrounds him. The series takes place in the California of 2099, now an island following an act of ecological terrorism. This California is the world center for the entertainment industry and, like the rest of this dark future, is not what you would imagine. Fierce corporations have turned the industry into a series of 'shadow cabinets' that will stop at nothing to obtain new entertainment properties. One employee, John Eisenhart, is out to make a name for himself by forcing the mysterious 'Knights of the Banner' to sell him their "concept" for exploitation. Eisenhart finds, however, that there is more to this group than meets the eye and that some extreme 'dirty tricks' may be in order. The conflict that follows leads to the birth of the Hulk of 2099, a character that will 'out Hulk' the Hulk and all his imitators.



Deadpool Hits Dead On

Tell *X-Force* readers to look out! Deadpool is getting his own four issue miniseries and it hits the shelves with an incredible cover enhancement. *Deadpool #1* boasts an embossed illustration of Deadpool leaning against a logo that measures the length of the cover. The logo outline is debossed (recessed) and printed in red metallic ink.

Deadpool is written by Fabian Nicieza, penciled by the blistering-hot Joe Madureira, and inked by Mark Farmer. That alone is enough to buy this book! The series kicks off when Deadpool's former employer kicks the bucket, and it's up to him to find the will. Unfortunately, Deadpool is pursued by various villains, all of whom have a mighty one to pick with him! Readers can look forward to slugfests involving Juggernaut, the Executive Elite, and the frightening new villain, Slayback. And, wait until they get a look at Black Tom Cassidy's wicked new look! Ships in June.

X-Men Now Saturday Morning's Top- Rated Series

The *X-Men*, Marvel Comics' phenomenally popular of super-powered mutants, have taken the world of Saturday morning television by storm with their *X-Men* animated series. The *X-Men* television series, which airs Saturday mornings on the Fox Children's Network at 11:00 AM (EST), has garnered huge A.C. Nielsen ratings points since it's sneak preview in October of 1992. As of January 30, 1993, the *X-Men* have scored the following statistics:

- *X-Men* ranked #1 in its time period among kids 2-11, 6-11, boys 2-11, 6-11, male teens, and households.

- *X-Men* ranked #1 for the entire morning among households, people 6-17, and teens.

- *X-Men* has ranked #1 with kids 6-17 since its October '92 premiere.

- *X-Men* scored its highest ratings ever among male teens (11.8 / 50), total teens (8.0 / 37), persons 6-17 (8.1 / 30), girls 6-11 (6.0 / 22), and households (4.8 / 15).

- *X-Men*'s 11.8/50 rating among male teens is more than the other three networks combined!

The *X-Men*, the most popular team of characters in comic books today, with annual sales in excess of fifty million copies, are a group of young people born with parahuman abilities. They find an ally in Professor Charles Xavier, the head of the School for Gifted Youngsters, whose goal is to mainstream the *X-Men* while protecting the world from mutants who abuse their powers.

Tales of the *X-Men* exploring themes of prejudice and diversity have garnered legions of loyal readers over the years, many of whom read all nine monthly *X-Men* titles. The newest entry is *X-Men Adventures*, an adaptation of the *X-Men* television series on Fox.

The success of the *X-Men* television series comes as the *X-Men* celebrate their thirtieth anniversary. Marvel Comics has planned some very special projects this summer to celebrate this event including state-of-the-art hologram covers, the death of a major character, a betrayal by another major character, and the return of the *X-Men*'s arch nemesis, Magneto.

Ren & Stimpy Get Their First Trade Paperback

The popularity that Ren & Stimpy have attained with their hit Nickelodeon series has crossed over to make their Marvel Comics series, *The Ren & Stimpy Show*, a big success. To celebrate their popularity, Marvel is reprinting the first four issues of the comics in a special 96 page trade paperback available this May.

Ren & Stimpy: Running Joke will feature all the great material from the first four issues including the frightening story of "FrankenStimpy", and the classic "Extra Cheesy, Thick and Crusty", in which the fellows take jobs as pizza delivery boys. The book will feature covers by Bill Wray, the artist who paints the backgrounds and still shots for the television series, as well as original comedy from the regular comic team of Dan Slott and Mike Kazaleh.

Spirits of Vengeance Celebrates First Anniversary

A glow in the dark cover by Adam and Andy Kubert and a wild new logo will grace the first anniversary cover of *Ghost Rider/Blaze: Spirits of Vengeance* #12. The series, written by Howard Mackie and illustrated by Adam Kubert and Bill Reinhold, will also celebrate this event with a new direction based on recent developments. The issue also will herald the beginning of next month's "Midnight Massacre."

In *Ghost Rider/Blaze: Spirits of Vengeance* #12, Ghost Rider and John Blaze must deal with the aftermath of the massacre at the carnival and the ongoing threat of Vengeance. John and the Ghost Rider also search for the meaning of the key given to Blaze by the dying Eli. What significance does the key hold, and which, of the many unanswered questions surrounding the Spirits, will the icon unlock? Our heroes, however, won't have much time to ponder these questions as Vengeance continues his savage attack.

For Whom The Bell Tolls

Imagine a book teaming two of the most popular characters in the Marvel Universe. This month, that dream comes true when *Venom: Funeral Pyre*, a 4-issue limited series, guest-starring the Punisher, hits your store! You know that Marvel wouldn't let an explosive team up between Venom and Punisher slip past you quietly! *Venom: Funeral*

Pyre #1 will sport an outrageous cover enhancement, one you've never seen before. Both characters are surrounded on the cover by flames created with special bronze holo-grafx "flaming foil," which simulates the flickering effect of real fire. Hey, and if that's not enough, the interior pages are printed on glossy *Fanfare* stock!

Written by *Punisher* veteran Carl Potts, *Venom: Funeral Pyre* features the awe-inspiring artwork of Tom Lyle, who's bigger than ever thanks to his contributions to *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #27, "Maximum Carnage," and *Robin*. The book finds Eddie Brock and Frank Castle taking aim at a San Francisco street gang outfitted with super technology, and also features a formidable new villain, whose introduction no reader will want to miss!

Marvel is promoting this book to sell big. *Venom* is without a doubt one of comicdom's most intriguing characters, and readers just can't get enough of him! And the *Punisher*, who packs no-nonsense artillery, has long been a favorite of comic book fans. Ships in June.

Sabretooth Gets Miniseries

Known for his appearances on FOX-TV's popular *X-Men* television show, the vicious villain Sabretooth is back on the rampage and hunting for Wolverine, in a book that premieres with a great die-cut cardstock cover! This incredible enhancement features a die-cut logo that appears to have been shredded by Sabretooth's claws; a red cover will peek through, revealing a montage of various events in



Wolverine's arch-foe's life. The rest of the book will be printed on luxurious *Fanfare* paper.

The praised creative duo, fan-fave Mark Texeira and Larry Hama team-up again for a blast of creative genius in *Sabretooth*. The outcome? Superb artwork an attention-stealing story! Texeira's hot-penciling history on *X-Men* continues with his electrifying pencils in *Sabretooth* #1. Hama's superb writing, which helped make the *Wolverine* series an outstanding success, is key in shaping *Sabretooth*'s superb story!

Sabretooth #1 features the first examination of Wolverine's cruelest foe. Sabretooth is stalked by a determined female assassin who is determined to avenge the murders of his innumerable victims! When Hama and Texeira delve into Sabretooth's secret life, his fate may change quickly! Adding to the excitement, Wolverine enters the murderous show as a guest star! Ships in June.

Mirage News

City at War Reprinted

Due to the tremendous popularity and subsequent re-orders of the *TMNT* "City at War" saga, Mirage Publishing has completely sold out of both issues #50 and #51! Both issues are being reprinted--#50 in June and #51 in July. Also available in July from Mirage is issue #61 of the 13-part "City at War" series, bringing readers one issue away from the story's dramatic conclusion in August.

A third poster in the *TMNT* Poster series featuring the combined talents of Erik Larsen and Michael Dooney and teaming up the Turtles with the Savage Dragon is also available this July from Mirage this summer.

Other Mirage offerings this July includes the full-color *Usagi Yojimbo* #3, concluding the 3-part "Shades of Green" *TMNT* crossover. A special promotional magnet is produced to accompany the release of this third *Usagi* issue from Mirage.

TMNT Goes Color

The return of Eastman and Laird to the reigns of the B&W *TMNT* series was one of the biggest events in recent Turtle history. The reunion more than doubled the press run of issue 50 (which is now out of print!). So consider this a warning, Mirage has even bigger plans in the works for the guys in green come this fall! After the completion of the "City at War" saga (issue #62 on

sale in August) the series will switch to full color. To reflect this major change, the book will be numbered as TMNT Volume 2 Number 1, just as Mirage did with their first issue of Usagi Yojimbo.

Although this change was a hard one to make for Mirage since they have enjoyed presenting the Turtles adventures in black-and-white for the past eight years, they are looking forward to the all new "colorful" future of the TMNT. Rest assured that the art and stories will remain gritty and yes, all the Turtles will be wearing the red bandannas!

The readership of the TMNT is incredibly loyal so with the renumbering and colorization Mirage is looking forward to welcoming many new readers. After all, that's what it's all about!



NEC News

Chainsaw Vigilante Spinoff

Ripping out of the pages of *The Tick* (issues #9 & 10) comes *The Tick*'s most feared and unpre-Tick-table adversary, *The*

Chainsaw Vigilante! This all-new ongoing bimonthly series features the kind of top quality stories and art that comics readers have come to demand. Issue #1 also sports a stunning metallic cover guaranteed to catch the readers' eyes. Either get on board or get out of the way!



Pure Imagination News

Wonderama

"It's my dreambook," says *Wonderama* editor Forrest J. Ackerman. "It's everything I've always wanted to write about!"

Pure Imagination is pleased to announce the ultimate in fantasy/horror research: *Wonderama*.

In 1957, publisher Jim Warren offered Ackerman the chance to edit the fantasy/horror magazine of his dreams. Forry wanted to call it *Wonderama* and planned to load it with all of the best photos and data from his fabulous collection. In the end, the

magazine was called *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and was designed for 12-year old monster lovers. Not a bad publication, but not really Ack's dream magazine.

Now, in 1993, Ackerman teams up with Pure Imagination to produce that long lost dream -- thirty years later, *Wonderama* lives!

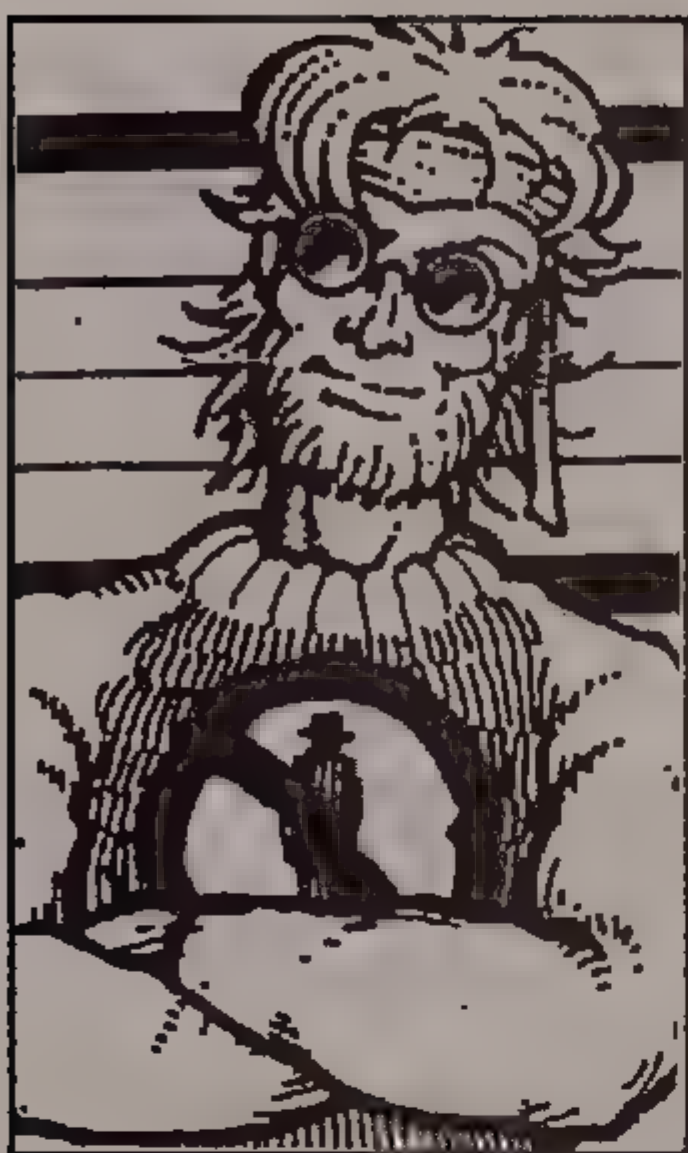
When Ackerman offered to finally create his magnum opus, he knew exactly what he wanted it to contain. First, he wanted to do an in-depth filmbook on the forgotten fantasy film *Just Imagine!*, the wild science fiction musical from 1930. A grimmer vision of the future is seen in *High Treason*, a preview of the Second World War, made a decade before it happened. Forry also unveils the three most obscure science fiction films ever lost -- revealing ultra-rare stills and previously undisclosed facts about this trio of missing masterpieces!

Dinomania heats up as *Jurassic Park* nears its release date, and *Wonderama* offers a complete view of over 100 years of life-sized dinosaur models. From the crystal pavilion in 1894 to modern-day mechanicals, each exhibit is rated and illustrated for your pleasure, with dozens of rare photos.

Plus -- Ray Harryhausen introduces his bronze sculptures with a portfolio of striking photographs. Ships in July.

Rip Off News

As the comic book industry in recent years has grown increasingly adult-oriented in its selection of storylines and situations, it has captured the attention and even the scholarship of academic professionals around the coun-



try.

Two comic book series, *Those Annoying Post Brothers* and *Savage Henry* (written by Matt Howarth, of Langhorne, PA and published by Rip Off Press of Auburn, CA), were the subjects of a research presentation made in November at the Seventeenth Annual Semiotics Society of America Conference, in Chicago, Illinois. Local sponsors of the conference, entitled "Semiotics of Consciousness," included the Humanitas Institute, the Department of Psychiatry of the Rush University/Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, and the Humanities Program of Rush University.

Psychiatrists and academics from across the disciplines attended the conference and heard Dr. Sid Sondergard, of St. Lawrence University (Canton, NY), examine Howarth's comic series as opportunities "to consider how the reader-as-analyst deciphers meaning from the text-as-subject, and narrative-as-dream." Employing the story "Deadtime for Jeri" from *The Annoying Post Brothers* #26 as illustration, Sondergard demonstrated how the simultaneity of word and image in Howarth's

work verifies the network modeling of psychic structure outlined by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. The artist's panels serve as "visual markers" which anticipate the reader's "need for additional contexts to clarify the ambiguities of linguistic markers alone."

Those Annoying Post Brothers and *Savage Henry* focus on a group of characters living in a place known as Bugtown, where individuals who die by unnatural causes always regenerate after a period of time. This reality forces a reassessment of the social taboo against murder, and leads some characters -- like the devious brothers Ron and Russell Post -- to consider mayhem and destruction as creative endeavors. Several of the focal characters also possess the ability to shift to other "reality levels" at the speed of thought. While this frequently moves the setting outside Bugtown, action inevitably returns there -- particularly during rehearsals of *The Bulldaggers*, *Savage Henry*'s high-intensity electronic band which features the musical talents of the elder god, C'Thulu.



Studio Inside News

The Death of From Beyonde Special Edition, with cover by Scott DiAngelis, is now in full color! This "Best of" compilation features some of the most popular stories to date from *From Beyonde* and more. This book contains an all-new bonus story entitled "Asphynxia" by Mike Bliss and Frank Forte. This all-new twisted tale takes us on a journey to Egypt where an archaeologist, Dr. Darius, stumbles upon a secret wall in the Sphinx carved in unknown runes. Ignoring the warnings of Egyptian mystics, Dr. Darius deciphers the runes and is led to the ancient underground city of Ry'leh. It is here that the evil Old Ones once did dwell. Now, he is powerless, as a voice from beyond commands him to let loose ancient evils that once ruled the earth. Can he escape with his sanity or will this evil consume his soul and devour the world? Artists this issue include Al (*Doghead*) Columbia, Frank Forte, Scott DiAngelis, and others that have appeared in *From Beyonde*. This book also contains a behind the scenes look at the creators of *From Beyonde* with rare photos and sketches.



Sky Comics News

Sky Comics has double miniseries in the works and from what we've seen on the artwork, they're all hits! What is meant by double miniseries?

First of all, there are two *Seeker* miniseries in production as of this writing. The first is *Seeker: Faith & Corruption* written by creator Joe Martin, pencilled by Willie (*Southern Knights*) Peppers and inked by newcomer Chris Leidenfrost. A demented crimelord seeks to build an army of crazed lunatics, a genius child criminal is luring a naive paranormal to abuse his power and the Seeker must stop them both. Can she? Who knows!

And then there's *Seeker: The Dark Night* by Joe Martin and illustrated by hot new talent, Tyler Bishop, in a style reminiscent of Steve (*Nexus*) Rude. It's about ten prominent city officials, a few bad guys, an old mansion on a dark and stormy night and, of course, the Seeker. This is one not to be missed!

Second, take a look at *Blood & Roses*! Many convention-goers and fans were the initial inspiration for this miniseries according to creator, Bob Hickey. And he's glad it happened that way or otherwise *Blood & Roses: Search For The Timestone* wouldn't be underway. It's by writer Jerry Smith and artists Gene Gonzales and Chris Leidenfrost. *B&R* is about two females discouraged with their life-situations and are given ground to focus their frus-



trations by travelling through time: Christiana Blood, a female reared to fight but when the Crusades come about she's denied the right, and Tamara Rose, a cop from the near future who is disheartened by all the "red tape of the system". Witness as they go from one time era to another on a quest for the mysterious Time-Lords. With covers by hot painter, Daerick (*Necroscope*, *Batman*) Gross, you can't not enjoy this ride! Then settle in your seats for *Blood & Roses: Future Past Tense*! The writing and inking is by Bob Hickey and the pencils are provided compliments of scorcher, Brad (*FemForce*, *Parts Unknown*) Gorby. A wild gunfight with an escaped criminal in the *near* future leads to a chase with alien dinosaur-hunters in the *far* future on a decimated Earth. Painted covers by Lurene (*Green Arrow*, *Star Trek: DSN*) Haines!

Look for these books and more from Sky Comics!

Topps News

Topps To Produce Dark Horse Comics Cards

The Topps Company, Inc. announces today that it has entered into an exclusive agreement with Dark Horse Comics to manufacture and distribute trading cards based upon Dark Horse comic book characters and properties.

"Dark Horse's record for quality, innovation and success has earned it a huge and loyal following throughout the comics community," says Ira Friedman, Topps Vice President of Publishing and New Product Development. "Their comics have attracted the finest creative talent in the industry and we expect our trading cards will also reflect the high level of creativity fans have come to expect from Dark Horse as well as Topps," say Friedman.

"The crossover between comics and cards has never been greater," offers Mike Richardson, Dark Horse President and Publisher. "When we decided to form an alliance with a trading card company, Topps cards provided me with countless hours of enjoyment and activity. We're ecstatic about our Dark Horse properties being showcased on comic cards from the #1 name in card category," says Richardson.

The Topps/Dark Horse association is already underway as the companies have two cross-promotional efforts in the works. The April issue of the Dark Horse comic, *Classic Star Wars* #8, will be polybagged with a Topps *Star Wars Galaxy* promotional trading card. At the same time, Topps will ship its 140 card *Star*

Wars Galaxy series to comics and card shops. In June, the logos from both companies will appear on cards together for the first time. These cards will promote the June debut of Dark Horse's *Comics' Greatest World* -- a sixteen-issue miniseries of new superhero comics -- and will be polybagged in the premiere issue of *Hero Illustrated*.

"Dark Horse's broad and diverse product line provides us with a wealth of very exciting card possibilities," says Topps' Friedman. "Fans can look forward to hearing more about this collaboration shortly, complete with details on the inaugural Topps/Dark Horse card series -- scheduled for Fall '93."

Tundra News

Eva Medusa

Another masterpiece from the Heavy Metal/Tundra hardcover line!

Voodoo. Black and white magic. Curses, gods, and serpents. Pleasures beyond human resistance. What mysterious and evil powers are controlling the minds of a man's wife and daughter? Why are men unable to resist these women? Why does a trail of death follow them?

This one-shot graphic novel is packed with striking full-color artwork and clear, dramatic storytelling. *Eva Medusa* is not to be missed!

Mr. Monster's Gal Friday, Kelly

Issue #1 of this three-issue color series features a horrifying new

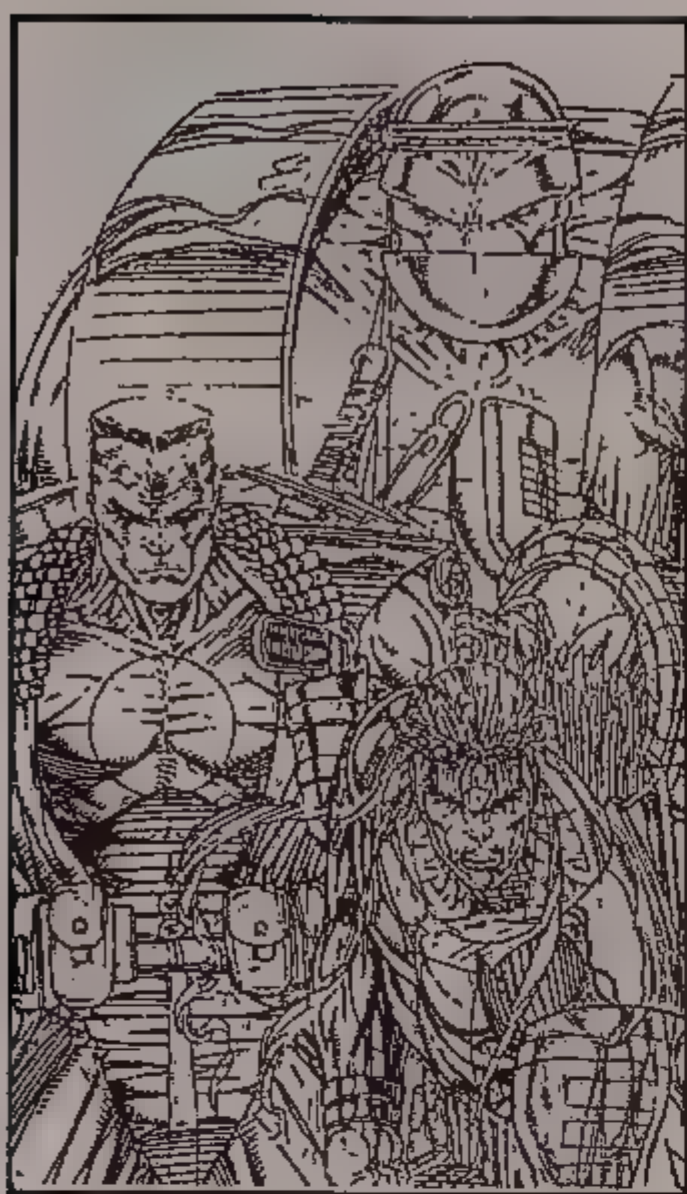
story by Alan Moore!

Romance! Recipes! Raw Horror! Mix 'em all together and what have you got? *Kelly*! For years, millions of comics fans have thrilled to the bloodsoaked adventures of Doc Stearn... Mr. Monster, the world's greatest creature-killer! You loved the art and went nuts over the stories. At least, that's what you told us. But Tundra knows better! The real reason you crazy fans buy *Mr. Monster* is to sneak a glimpse of Doc's smart and sexy Gal Friday, Kelly! Well, now you can glimpse till your heart's content, because Kelly's finally got her very own comic! For you fans who claim to buy *Mr. Monster* for Doc Stearn himself, have no fear, you'll get plenty of the world's greatest monster-fighter, too.



Valiant News

1993's premiere event is sure to be the history-making Valiant/Image crossover. *Deathmate*, the title for the six-part series, brings together the industry's two hottest and fastest growing companies. "Deathmate is a logical extension of the commonalities



between Valiant and Image. Both companies share many things; enthusiasm about the creative process, a genuine affection for the medium itself, and the use of innovative marketing techniques. A collaborative effort coming out of such a similar philosophy seemed only natural," said Valiant publisher Steve Massarsky.

"Deathmate is a love story to end all time... literally," said Bob Layton, Valiant's editor-in-chief. "The two universes will be brought together to form an alternate timeline much darker and much more sinister than either of the originals." The catalyst is a chance encounter between Valiant's Solar, Man of the Atom and Void, from Jim Lee's *WildC.A.T.S.* In the far future, Solar splits into two personae, and one of these leaves Earth to "find other planes of reality to explore" (a scene already played out in the pages of *Rai* #0). This split-persona Solar finds Void, and they fall in love... that's when the trouble begins. The strange nature of their joining begins to unravel the strands of time, creating the alternate amalgamated continuity where Image and Val-

iant characters exist side-by-side.

Deathmate begins in June with the 32-page prologue that sets up the storyline, bringing the two universes together. The prologue will be solicited by Valiant with a \$2.95 retail price and feature a foil-enhanced, card stock cover by Jim Lee and Bob Layton. In true collaborative spirit, both companies will contribute artistically to the prologue. Written by Bob Layton, the book features both Valiant and Image creators working together, and reads like a who's who of the comics industry.

Beginning July 1st, then approximately every two weeks thereafter through August, a new book in the series will be released. The four middle books will be 48 pages in length. Each book will feature both Valiant and Image characters, and be produced by different creative teams from the respective companies. Among the proposed team-ups, *H.A.R.D.C.A.T.S.* (select members of Valiant's *H.A.R.D. Corps* and Jim Lee's *WildC.A.T.S.*), Rob Liefeld's *Youngblood* and *Bloodshot*, Marc



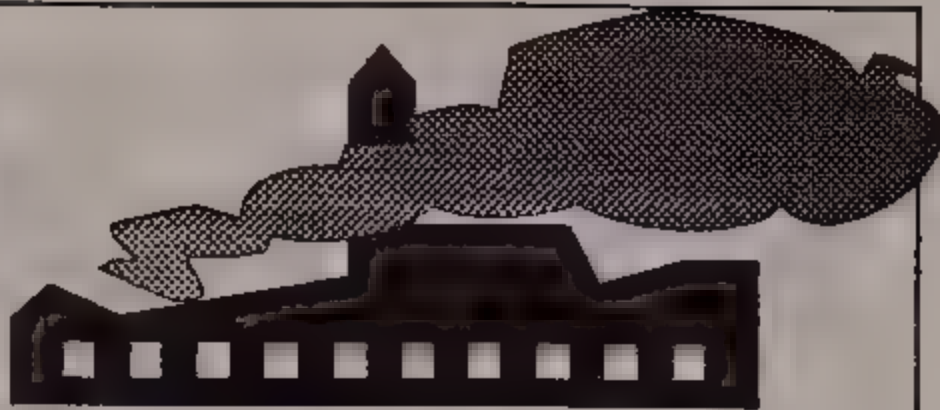
Silvestri's *Cyberforce* with *X-O Manowar*, *Harbinger* and *Brigade*, and *Solar/Supreme*. These books will be color-coded instead of numbered. Deathmate Black will be produced by Homage Studios, Deathmate Red will be produced by Extreme Studios, and both will be solicited by Image. Deathmate Blue and Yellow will be produced by Valiant. Each book will have a \$4.95 retail price and feature a foil-enhanced, card stock cover.

September will see the 32-page Deathmate epilogue, which brings the story to its exciting conclusion. As with the prologue, creators from both companies will work together on the epilogue. The Deathmate epilogue will be in the same format and have the same retail price as the Deathmate prologue, and be solicited by Image.

Deathmate will be the most heavily promoted direct market project ever. Both advertising and promotional support from such media sources as the Sci Fi Channel are planned. Extensive trade advertising is planned, and various ancillary licenses including trading cards, t-shirts, etc. are currently being negotiated. At least four promotional posters, two from Valiant and two from Image, will be produced, and every retailer will receive one free premium issue of each book for every 50 copies of that issue they order. Taking a page from President Clinton's successful bid for the White House, three bus tours, each making stops at select comic shops along their respective routes, are currently in the works to coincide with a major convention this summer.

In short, 1993 is going to go down as the year of Deathmate!

Industry News



Industry News

New Improved X-Men Figures

Comic Images has announced that it "must regretfully cancel all orders on X-Men PVC figures solicited for June, July 1992." The cancelled PVC's are the Beast, Cyclops, Marvel Girl, Angel, and Iceman figures and six packs (solicited on page 101 of *Previews* #4—Apr. 92) and the Psylocke, Cyclops, and Rogue figures and six packs (solicited on page 87 of *Previews* #5—May 92). But, on the positive side, Comic Images promises it is "re-designing even hotter poses right now" and a new solicitation will occur in the near future.

Black Age of Comics Mini-Con

The first mini-convention showcasing the *Black Age of Comics* was a successful, groundbreaking, historic event. It focused on the history of the *Black Age of Comics* as an established genre in the international comics industry. After years of networking with Craig Rex Perry, Turtel Onli felt that the time was right to organize the mini convention to showcase the extensive range of comic material created from an African American

perspective. Onli coined the term '*Black Age of Comics*' several years ago to give a collective identity to this creative movement.

The city of Chicago was the logical site for various reasons. It is the home of the largest and most successful Black-owned company — Johnson Publishing. Their publications — *Jet* and *Ebony*, along with *The Chicago Defender*, the largest Black oriented daily paper — are representative of the continuation of the rich tradition of independent publishing in Chicago that dates back to the abolitionist movement of the 1800's. It was decided that the mini-convention should be held in the Southside Community Art Center due to its status as the last of the Work Project Administration (WPA) centers commissioned during the Great Depression to nurture the artistic careers of talented Americans. It is in this outstanding tradition that Onli and Perry organized the event.

Advance notice of the mini-con was distributed throughout the community. It was listed in the calendar sections of the local press and broadcast media and local high-schools carried information through their art departments. The response and participation was amazing.

Throughout the entire six hours of the event there was non-stop flow of traffic. People of all ages, Blacks and whites gathered to learn about the *Black Age of Comics*, to hear the speakers and to view all of the comics which were on display, including books

and posters representing over twenty-six *Black Age* titles which have been published since 1979. Collectors found a wealth of titles, original artwork, and reproductions from which to choose. Professionals and students alike were able to refine their perspective on their field of interest. There was a feeling of excitement in the air as people had the opportunity to view all of the material on display and to speak to the artists who displayed their wares.

Plans are already under way to host the first national convention of *Black Age* interest in July of 1993. If you are open to the potential of the diversity of this artform — be there! The convention will include all available *Black Age* titles. You will find it professional, educational, and expansive. Onli sums up the experience by saying: "Welcome to the *Black Age of Comics*!"

New Toy Company Formed

New York, NY, Monday, March 22, 1993 — Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. (NYSE: MRV), Toy Biz, Inc., and renowned toy creator Avi Arad today announced the formation of a new and expanded Toy Biz, which will become a 46% owned subsidiary of Marvel.

Marvel will contribute its master toy license and a working capital investment. Entrepreneur Isaac Perlmutter, who owns the privately-held, New York-based Toy Biz, will contribute all of its assets and will become Chair-

man of the new Toy Biz. Mr. Arad will develop toys exclusively for the new Toy Biz and will also have an equity interest. Mr. Arad has developed toy lines for Hasbro, Mattel, Tyco, Galoob, and Toy Biz among others.

Toy Biz had approximately \$65 million in 1992 net revenues and is growing rapidly. Its products include Caboodles, Baby Loves to Talk, BOTS, VoiceBots, My Pal 2, the Eliminator, and, since 1990, Marvel Super Hero action figures, including its most popular line based on Marvel's mutant *X-Men*.

Mr. Arad said the new Toy Biz will develop a full line of Marvel toys aimed at Marvel's growing audience, expand other toy lines and increase distribution internationally. Currently, Toy Biz distributes to all major retailers, including Toys 'R Us, Wal-Mart, K Mart, Target, JC Penney, and Kaybee Toys.

Terry Stewart, President and COO of Marvel, said the new Toy Biz is expected to provide Marvel with substantial financial and strategic benefits: "We can convert a standard royalty into a substantially greater economic interest. In addition, we will have considerably more control than if we had granted a master license to a larger, unaffiliated company. Because Toy Biz contracts out all manufacturing, we can maintain Marvel's high margin, low capital investment profile. Ultimately, it enables Marvel to continue to expand its portfolio of youth entertainment products."

All parties have signed definitive agreements. The transaction is subject to a Hart Scott Rodino filing and approvals from Marvel's banks, which are ex-

pected to be completed within 30 days.

Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. is a leading youth entertainment company in comic books, sports picture cards, consumer products licensing, and candy and gum products.

Death Debacle

Death: The High Cost of Living #3 shipped with a two-page spread that was incorrectly printed back-to-back. DC Comics is in the process of shipping a corrected version in identical quantities to the first go-round. DC asks that you "give copies of the corrected version to consumers who purchased the incorrect version, and bag both versions together for any unsold stock."

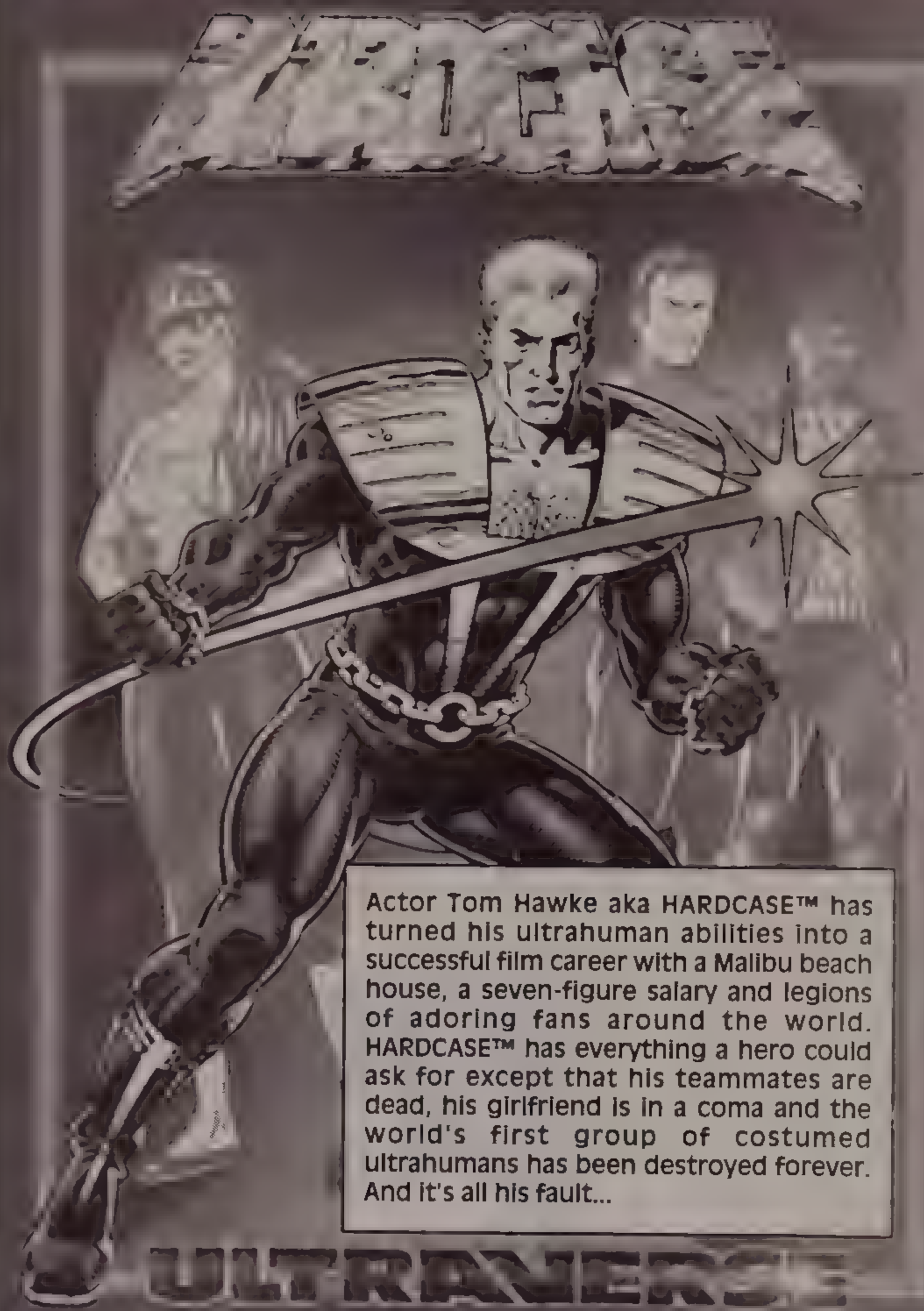
To make it easier to tell the two versions apart, DC has printed the corrected version with a slightly (details not yet revealed) different cover. DC will be running ads in *Comics Buyer's Guide*, *Comic Shop News*, and other publications to notify fans that they can obtain a corrected copy from their comics store.

Bullet Hole Conflict

Adhesive Comics Co. has sent out a press release asking for a public apology from Malibu for allegedly "ripping off" their bullet hole promotional program idea. Adhesive stated that it "first promoted *Jab* #3 as the special Bullet Hole Issue at the Dallas Fantasy Fair in early August 1992" and that "members of Malibu's creative team for *The Protectors* were present at the August trade show and were given copies of a promotional brochure for the bullet hole issue." Adhesive goes on to infer that *Protectors* #5 with the die-cut "force beam hole" was a direct rip off of their idea.

Malibu Marketing Director Alan Payne responded by saying that he had formulated the idea for a "hole-punched" comic before he was hired by Malibu in early October of '92, and that he knew nothing about Adhesive Comics' idea until November, after he had put his concept into development.





Actor Tom Hawke aka **HARDCASE™** has turned his ultrahuman abilities into a successful film career with a Malibu beach house, a seven-figure salary and legions of adoring fans around the world. **HARDCASE™** has everything a hero could ask for except that his teammates are dead, his girlfriend is in a coma and the world's first group of costumed ultrahumans has been destroyed forever. And it's all his fault...

ULTRANEERSE

James Hudnall • Jim Callahan

Illustration by Dave Gibbons

June '93

COMICS NOW

by Jerry Smith



by Jerry Smith

Time to check out some first issues that have recently hit the stands. The first #1 this month is Image's *Mystery Incorporated*, written by Alan Moore and drawn by Rick Veitch and Dave Gibbons.

I'm sure I'm one of many to identify Alan Moore as one of my favorite comics writers of all time, arguably the finest comic book writer of the '80s. Moore has said that he feels at least partly responsible for the dystopic tone of comics in general since he left the field, and he wanted to do something different in Image's 1963 series, of which *Mystery Inc.* is a part. Judging from the tone and content of this book, Moore must be feeling pretty guilty.

I thought certain Marvel creators were paying too much homage to the '60s—Moore and company make them look absolutely contemporary. The group *Mystery Incorporated*, Crystal Man, Neon Queen, The Planet, and Kid Dynamo, are the Fantastic Four as published by Image Comics. This book is more Lee/Kirby than Lee/Kirby ever was. It's a total pastiche of the

Marvel comics of the '60s, right down to the Mary Tyler Moore hairdo on Neon Queen. *Mystery Incorporated* should have been an old Marvel comic. After all, it's got goofy nicknames for the creative team, cigar shaped rocketships, little character heads next to the narration boxes ... I'm surprised there's not a "This one has it all, pilgrim!" blurb on the cover. The characters all speak in that jiltin' Stan Lee style: Crystal Man, referring to an invader to the Baxter Build..., I mean, *Mystery Incorporated's Headquarters*, says, "Hmm ... He might have done some damage in there! One of us should check" Kid Dynamo: "Way ahead of you, chisel-chin! I'll be there and back quicker'n greased lightning!" Really.

The burning question is, is it good? Well, it's different, and different isn't necessarily good. Sometimes nostalgia is best taken in small doses.

If Moore wanted to do something different with the superhero genre, I would have preferred him to take it a bit, just a bit, more seriously. I can pick up any Lee/Kirby issue of *Fantastic Four* and have more fun than *Mystery Incorporated*.





Next is *Wildstar* #1, another Image book co-created, written and drawn by Al Gordon and Jerry Ordway. This one's a winner. It's great to see Jerry Ordway's art again, he's been away from the drawing board too long, and he makes up for lost time on *Wildstar*.

The protagonist of the book, Wildstar, is costumed character being pursued by other costumed characters. He has in his possession a hand-held time machine, which the group of "bad guys" tries to take away from him, rather violently.

The costumed characters in this book all have what seem to be symbiotic parasites on different portions of their bodies. It's not explained exactly what these parasites do for the host, but presumably they give them some kind of super powers (and they pick the most interesting body parts to attach themselves to). One thing is clear about these parasites, they don't leave their hosts easily unless they want to. Wildstar removes quite a few from unwilling hosts in the battle to capture him, and it's not a pretty sight.

Wildstar #1 stirs up just enough questions to bring me back for more. The characters all have distinct personalities, the time travel aspect of the story is used for maximum effect, and the art is by Jerry Ordway. That alone should be enough to give this title a try. Personally, I can't wait to find out more about these characters, especially the mysterious Wildstar himself.

Darker Image #1 is a new anthology series set up to explore the darker, grittier side of the Image Universe.

The first story is about a character called *the Maxx*, by Sam Kieth and Bill Messner-Loebs. I didn't get it.

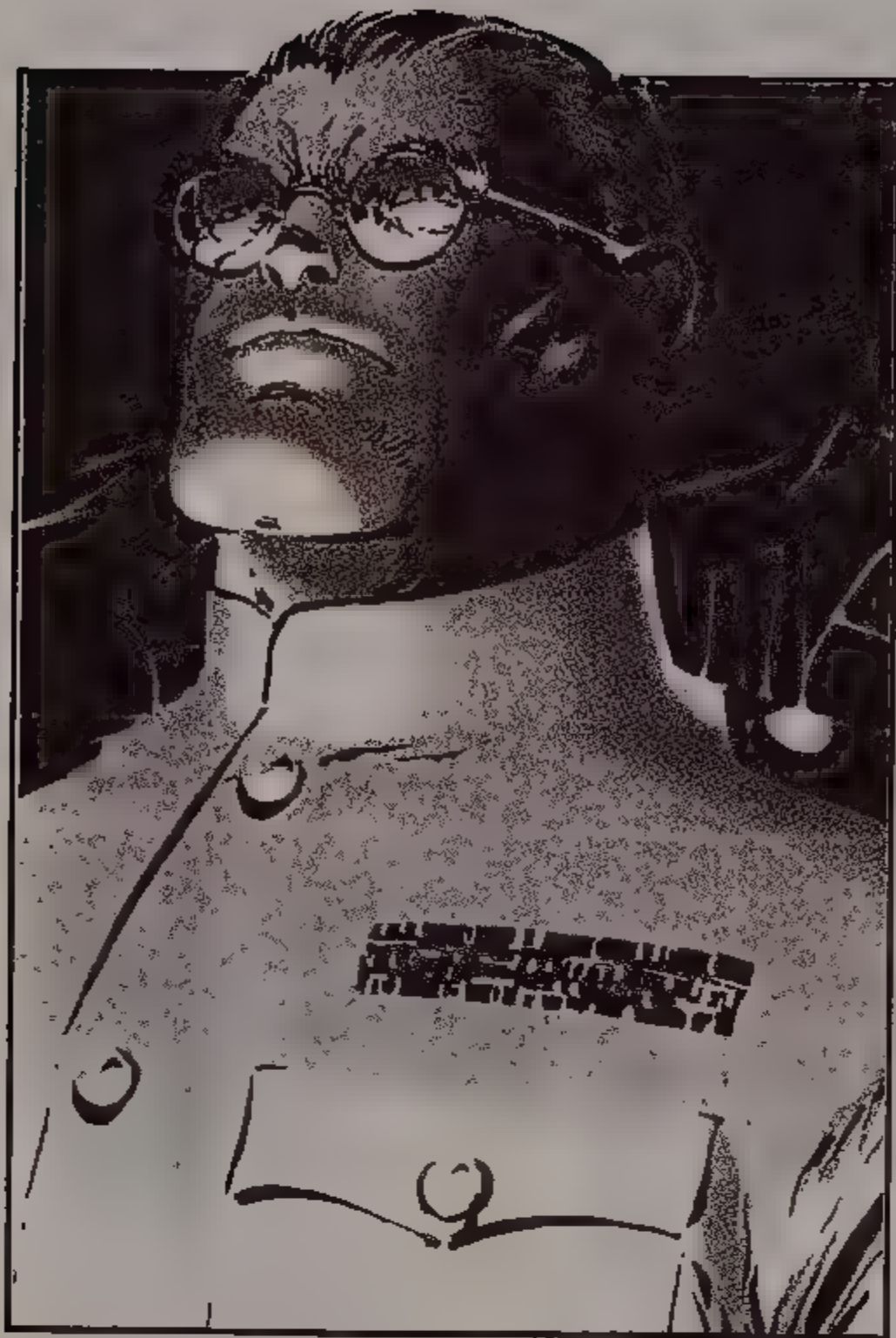
Next is a new Rob Liefeld creation, *Bloodwulf*. Bloodwulf is character in the grand Lobo tradition (if you could call such a tradition "grand." I happen to love Lobo, so I would). Bloodwulf, like Lobo, is an anti-hero whose adventures feature over-the-top violence and lots of funny dialog. Especially enjoyable is the cameo appearance of Marvel's Cable. He appears in about two panels before Bloodwulf blows him away.

This story is a lot of fun, and if Image and DC want to generate wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, they need to do a Bloodwulf/Lobo team-up. Add Wolverine and everyone involved could buy their own country and retire.

To round out the cast of *Dark Image* #1 is *Deathblow*, a new character created by Brandon Choi and Jim Lee. This is the best work Jim Lee has ever done. The artwork is done in shades of gray, blue and black, and is extremely dark and moody. I detect a bit of Frank Miller influence, but the new style is all Jim Lee.

The story deals with a mercenary, Michael





Cray, who is dying of cancer. Because he has nothing to lose, he decides to spend the rest of his life fixing his past mistakes. That could mean anything from wasting informants to assassinating heads of state. The government sends his best friend, a Naval Lieutenant, to stop him. This is going to be good.

Continuing their true-to-the-film cinema-based comics, Dark Horse offers *Predator: Race War*, with a story by crime novel writer Andrew Vachss, adapted by Randy Stradley and drawn by Jordan Raskin.

It seems those nasty Predators are at it again. No matter how many times Arnold or Danny kick their alien butts, they have to come back to earth and prove what tough guys they are. In *Race War*, those alien nut-boys have decided that the world's toughest game lies in the Federal prison system. So, they slip on that ever-so-convenient invisibility cloak and go hunting for serial killers, rapists, and career criminals within the walls of Paloverde State Penitentiary. As usual, they succeed in killing most of their game.

Vachss and Stradley are two names I have never been disappointed by. Even if you're not much of a Predator fan, you'll like *Race War*. It reads more like a novel with pictures than a comic book. Vachss and Stradley rely on characterization and plot to tell their story, not just page-size panels of violence. In fact, there isn't a great deal of violence in this book, but when it comes, it's powerful and bloody. Not for the weak of heart.

ARENA #13

MAGAZINE AUG. 93



TOM LYLE

SPIDER-MAN and VENOM © 1993 Marvel Comics Group, Inc.

PREVIEW

DOMINIQUE

by Charles & Lisa Moore and Jim Balent
Published by Dark Horse Comics



A Conversation With ...Todd McFarlane

by Paul H. Birch

Paul H. Birch: Were you surprised that *Spawn* #1 sold so well?

Todd McFarlane: I'm not one for guessing numbers and stuff, but after *Youngblood*, I figured we could do a million. First issues are fairly easy to sell these days, and I had a number one book on *Spider-man*, and sold millions, so I've been down that road before.

Most people compared *Spawn* #1 to *Spider-man* #1, because that was my first writing job. That really hurt a lot of people, and obviously the scars are still there for them. They thought the writing was a little bit better. I think a lot of people were just expecting *Spider-man* with a cape, and the package was different to what a lot of people expected, that always helps in getting a positive reaction.

PB: A number of the Image collective have chosen to do team books, but for the most part, with the noticeable exception of *Infinity Inc.* early in your career, you've always opted for single characters.

TM: I did two years on *Infinity Inc.*, and that book was twelve characters beating up on twelve bad guys. I love Roy Thomas, but he scarred me from doing team books! I didn't even know what their belts looked like!

I can handle two or three characters, if I do a crossover or something, but that's after I've established that I knew what, say, *Spider-man* looked like so I didn't have to worry.

I knew I was going to get into the writing and I'm not good enough that I can throw twenty guys in the book and make them work. I can barely do that with

one character! Team books, because I'm not very good and, even with a lot of people who are, there are a lot of token shots with head shots and a guy going, 'Hi.' and the next on going 'Morning,' so they each get one word. To have to develop twelve guys in the space of twenty pages, I'm not too sure; you have to be a hell of a writer and there's not too many of them out there...and I'm surely not one of those!

PB: Then why'd you become a writer?

TM: I find with my work that the whole is better than the parts. There's a lot of guys who draw prettier than I do, who ink better and guys who have cooler storytelling. I look at that kind of

work and say 'Why aren't the fans going after that guy?' But for some reason when I put all my stuff together it strikes a chord in the buying public. I don't get it anymore than anybody else does, but I don't have control over it. People almost try and take it out on me personally; that I manipulate North America and some of the other countries that get our books. Well, I'm sorry but those kids get in line and buy those books without me beating them over the head.

PB: It wasn't until you were 17 that you started reading comics?

TM: I was a late bloomer.

PB: You took a degree in graphic design, didn't you?

TM: Yeah, I had a more tech-



nical background, not so much artistic; learning how to put a book together, typesetting, and running a press, paste-up, etc. But three weeks before I graduated I got my first comic book job, so you can imagine how much studying I did for my finals!

PB: *How difficult was it breaking into the field?*

TM: It was probably a little bit easier back then, they were looking for people. They had these things saying send in your samples. I wasn't all that talented when I broke in so it was probably a lot tougher on me than some other guys. But I was the kind of guy who was diligent, I wouldn't take no for an answer. I think they got sick of seeing my samples and went 'Give the kid a job, then we don't have to deal with twenty five packages from him every month!' I became a nuisance and broke 'em!

PB: *I wondered what your working relationship with Peter David was like on *The Incredible Hulk*?*

TM: I loved that Petey guy! I worked with him for two years and out of all the writers I worked with, without question, he was the most talented. He wrote the best stories. But on a personal level, I'm not going to get into that.

There's a lot of jealousy and envy out there. We're not saying we want everyone to back us, we're just saying get out of our way, why are you running interference? I don't like everything Fantagraphics put out but I'm not trying to stop them. There are a lot of people out there who are frustrated writers and artists. Peter used to work on staff for Marvel, so I think there's a little bit of the company still in his blood.

PB: *Whose decision was it to create the now infamous Spider-man title?*

TM: From what I heard, they were always trying to come up with another Spider-Man book, it was just that the timing was never there. When I was quitting *Amazing Spider-Man* they said

'Todd, we know you're having some success, we like your stuff and we really don't want you to go. Now's maybe as good a time as ever to put out that other Spider-Man book'.

I'd have been content to go onto some other book, the only thing was, I wanted to get into writing. I said 'Great idea, but I'd want to write the book and I think you guys'd be fools if you let me'. But I guess they were foolish enough to let me.

I wanted to draw my own stories, and to do that I had to become a writer. You seem to have the market on writing talent over your of the waters [in Europe] with people like Gaiman and Morrison: those guys are amazing! I would never profess to be in the same ball game as them, but to draw my own stories there was only one way. Given that I thought I'd get rejected by the good writers. I thought, "Why not write it myself?"

PB: *Why'd you leave?*

TM: 90% of it was because I became a father. My wife's always been there by my side and it was my turn to return the favor. It wasn't like I had a job where I had to show up everyday. I literally walked away from my career to help my wife, which may seem a little strange to some people. Some people can't afford to, but I had the choice. What was I giving up by staying at home with my wife and child? Two things that I never really cared about, fame and fortune. Big deal!

PB: *Were you censored on Spider-man?*

TM: Not really, I seemed to get most of my arguments through. It just came down to the point where I got tired of arguing. I couldn't see the point of why I should be arguing in the first place. I don't mind interference



if it's productive, it's the bull of 'We've got to change this because 12 years ago in panel 6, this guy said...'. It's just halting the process on a book that might be late anyway! I think most editors do editorial things for one reason: to justify their paychecks at the end of the week, and they don't usually have a reason why, give me an answer 'I think it doesn't work symmetrically...I think that the language wasn't smooth.' They don't ever say that, they just say 'Because'.

I was mentally worn out, I could either continue to bitch or quit. I wanted to be with my family, but I knew I was going to quit so that probably made me even more impatient to.

PB: *How do you differentiate between 'speculators' wanting multiple copies of books, and your desires as a creator, to have the work 'read'?*

TM: I wish they wouldn't buy multiple copies, but then I wish there was world peace! It's beyond my control. It's not for me to dictate to the public what they should do, it's for Todd McFarlane to dictate to Todd McFarlane what he should do.

PB: *What's the future hold for Spawn?*

TM: I'll play up the detective in there and stuff like that. I've got a general idea of what I'm going to do.

PB: *You mentioned the likelihood of Overkill, co-created on video with Rob Liefeld, as possibly appearing in Spawn. Anyone else?*

TM: Lotus, who's from Japan. I always wanted to do Japanese sound effects; I felt they were the coolest! I spoke to Tom (Orzechowski, letterer/editor) and said every time he makes a noise let's make it in Japanese. They don't put 'Screech' for a tire,

they'll put this thing that looks like a lightning bolt. Even out of context as long as the effect looks good, I want to use it.

PB: *Do you foresee problems with company crossovers?*

TM: I can see those potential wars but as soon as I see them, I'll get out of negotiations. I'm not here to beg somebody to put out a good comic and make a lot of money, the worst that can happen is we keep doing Image books. I don't really see why we can't pull off a Batman-Spawn or Spawn-Spider-Man, but if it comes down to company policies or whatever, I'm not going to sit there wasting my time and money. If I do my job right *Spawn* will be outselling all those characters anyway.

It's not like I need Spider-Man or Aliens to help my character sell, but wouldn't it be cool if we did it. Let's just forget this idea that we hate each other. I don't hate the people at Marvel — I hate the Marvel system. It was there before they came along, it's just that those guys are perpetuating it, but it's their decision. I hope it

comes off, I'm looking forward to that Aliens-Spawn-Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles crossover — wouldn't that just be the coolest? I'm trying to envisage Spawn with this saliva-dripping Alien; then along comes the cowabungas! It'd be too stupid to be true but I'd like to do it because I'm a weird kind of a guy.

PB: *What about working with other writers?*

TM: The idea that I have for Spawn being a tragic hero might take me ten years to pull off, but someone like Gaiman or Miller could probably do it in 3 issues. They would get to the point faster than I would.

PB: *What's happening at Image?*

TM: There's plenty of pretty oddball stuff coming out. Each creator is coming up with ideas and trying to put them together: some guys are spinning stuff off from their books, others are staying pretty close to home with the one character. That's the beauty of Image comics: there are no rules.



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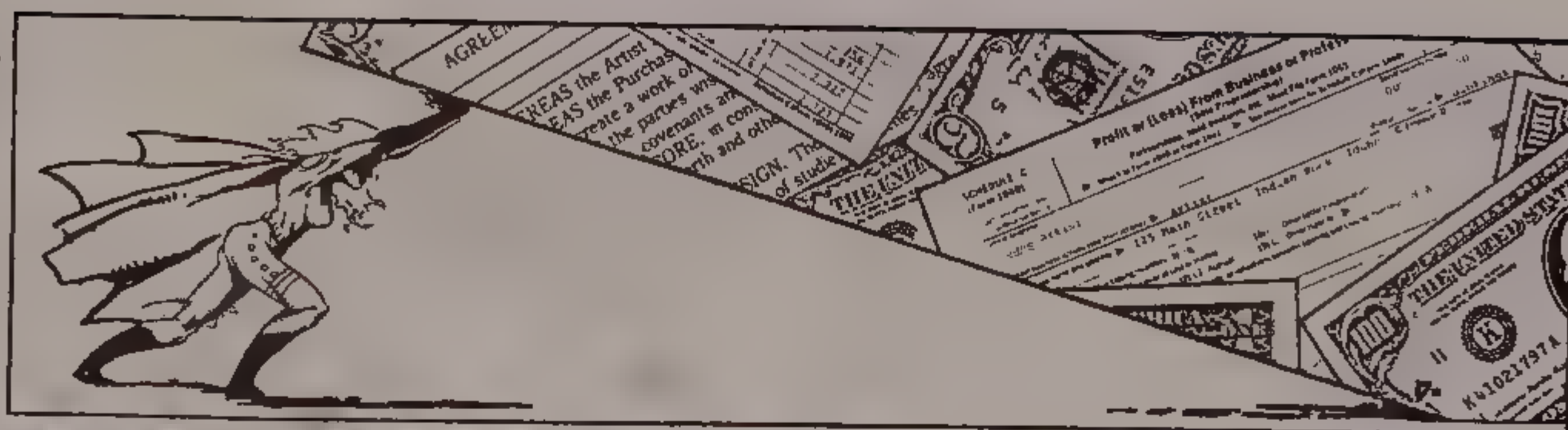
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COMIC BOOK PAGES PRO





BUSINESS Of Comics

by Lurene Haines

Getting Into The Business Of Comics will return next issue, when we will cover *Approaching Potential Employers: Step 3 - The Personal Interview*. We will cover getting ready, personal presentation and interview etiquette. Until then, here's a brief overview of the topics we've covered so far, so you can catch up.

The Introduction

We started out by examining what the business of comics is all about, how the comic industry is structured, and steps to take toward becoming a business professional. I pointed out a variety of starting-out characteristics important to your success; **enthusiasm is indispensable, bringing your own work experience to bear, don't be afraid to ask questions, and be sure to listen.**

Part 1: An Overview Of The Industry

Here we looked at how the comic industry market could best be exploited to help you develop a professional career. You want to **do research** to learn about and know your market, **prepare an organized record** of potential employers, and **send for submissions guidelines** so that you can follow correct procedure when submitting samples. Research, organization and business procedure; three keys to getting started.

Part 2: Preparing A Professional Portfolio

Here we determined just what a portfolio is, and why it is important in your search for employment. Just remember to keep in mind all the different factors when preparing a professional portfolio. You must **choose the type of portfolio display case** best suited to your needs, decide whether you will use **copies or originals** in your display, include **tearsheets** or any copies of **published work** you may have done, carefully **select the right genre** of work to display (ie., superhero v. horror), decide the **number of pages**

you will show, what type of work you want to get (ie. pencilling v. painted), **select a layout** that most impressively displays your work. And finally, don't forget **sample sheets and business cards**, those little extras that show your professionalism, and give you the edge over the other **newcomers**.

Part 3: Approaching Potential Employers: Step One - Convention Feedback and Making Introductions

In Part 3 we looked at how conventions affect approaching potential employers. It is critical to remember the importance of **attending conventions**. When attending a convention, you will want to organize a strategy that includes **finding out the portfolio review times** and showing your work samples, getting **professional critiques** from attending creators, sitting in at **panel discussions** and checking out any displays. You will also want to take advantage of any specially scheduled **socializing events** such as cocktail parties, dinners, dances, or gatherings hosted by professionals that are open to both pros and convention attendees. Conventions present you with a variety of methods for meeting possible employers, including **introducing yourself** at both the convention and any related convention social events, **showing your portfolio** to publishers, editors and creators and **using feedback** from their critiques of your work to improve your chances of gaining work in the future.

Part 4: Approaching Potential Employers Step Two - The Mail Route

Last month we considered the various steps to take when contacting a potential employer through the mail, you are ready to move on as a freelancer. Remember to consider the benefits of sending samples by mail, and **which mail system** will best serve your purposes. Then you must **decide if your work is of sufficient quality** to merit consideration for employment. If you decide it is, the next step is to **familiarize yourself with the mail procedures**, stock mail supplies for mak-

ing and sending sample packages, and organize a system for tracking the samples you send. Once this is done, your next step is to get a copy of the submission's guidelines for the companies you wish to approach, and decide which editor or editors to target.

Make sure you use the correct submissions format depending on whether your samples are being sent unsolicited or if you are making a follow-up contact. You should make sure you include an introductory cover letter, a business card, and an S.A.S.E. or response card. If you are following up on a personal contact, this should be reflected in your cover letter. Send samples out consistently, and with a demonstrable level of improvement each time. Keeping a regular system of updating your samples will allow the editors to mark the increase in your skill, as well as proving your professionalism.

Finally, use feedback to improve your work. Display your professionalism by applying any critical advice to your benefit, and expressing

appreciation for the time taken to provide you with that feedback.

Still To Come

In the months to come, we'll look at how you can apply what we've covered, and combine it with other topics to improve your chances of developing a professional career. We will consider *Approaching Potential Employers* - the personal interviews, and adjustments based on critiques. We'll also cover the *Legal Business of the Biz* and *What To Do Now That You've Got The Job*. I'll also look at *Special Cases: Creators Aren't The Only Working Stiffs In Comics*.

As an added bonus, a number of comic professionals will provide guest 'appearances'. They will contribute their insights and advice on getting into the business.

Until next time, keep working at Getting Into The Business Of Comics!

ARENA #11

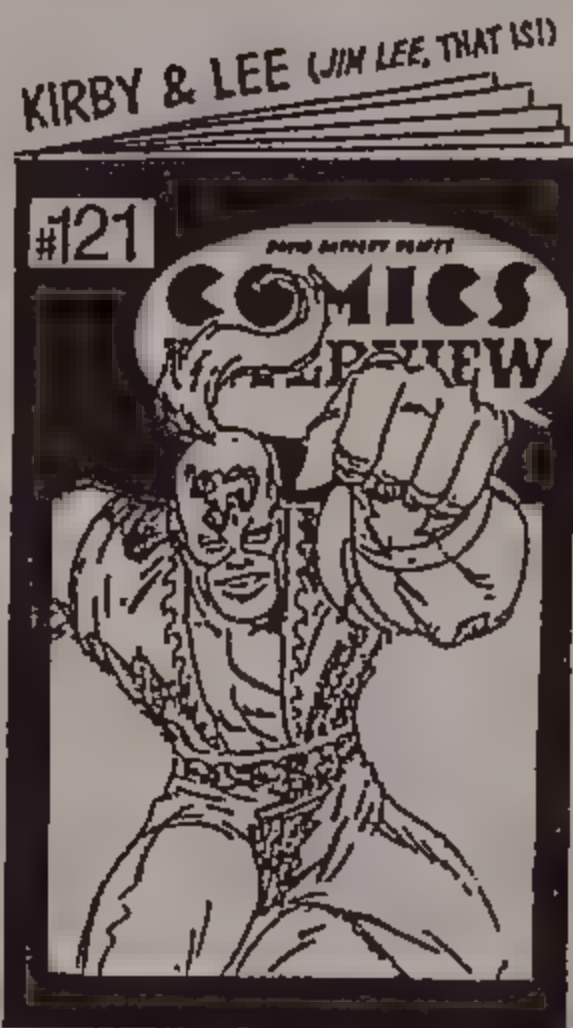
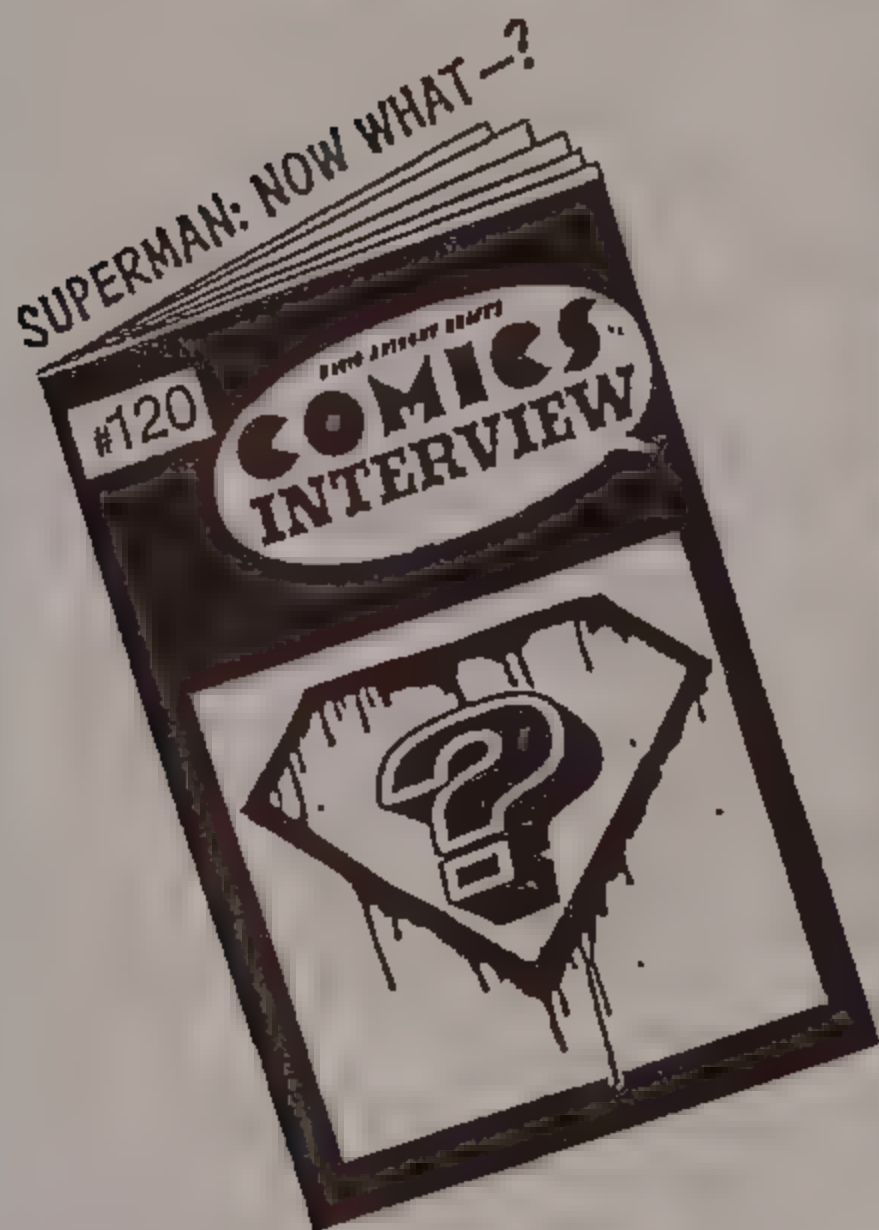
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A Conversation With ...Daerick Gross

Part 2

Interview by Joe Martin

This is the continuation of our chat with Daerick Gross from Arena #9 about his current and future projects such as the new Daerick Gross Imprint line to be published under Heroic Publishing beginning this summer in comics retail shops near you. Look for it, but read this first.

Joe Martin: So, you've told us about the *Mythfits*, *Murcielaga the She-Bat*, the *Reiki Warriors*, *Blackwatch* and *Jinni*... do you have other things planned?

Daerick Gross: The only other thing that I have slated as of now is a satirical four issue miniseries or a large volume one shot entitled *Buck Naked*.

JM: [Laughs]

DG: It's a satire on society, and on comic books and superheroes.

It's about a character who's been sent to Earth from another planet and grows up on a nude beach in California with hippy parents and becomes the world's first superhero nudist. It deals with how he gets away with this and how society deals with it.

JM: It's not the norm of society.

DG: No.

JM: Matter of fact, it's against the law, isn't it?

DG: In most places, but there are ways around it.

JM: That's crazy! You have some original ideas, that's for sure!

DG: Well, that's the whole point. I got the idea because there was this guy on Berkeley Campus running around naked and it was a whole month or two before they decided he couldn't do it anymore. Actually, I had already thought up the idea about Buck - it's about ten years old - but this guy brought a lot of new ideas to

my head. I'll be writing *Buck Naked*. I'll probably be doing the whole project.

One thing I want to make clear right down the line is that all the titles are "Mature Reader" titles.

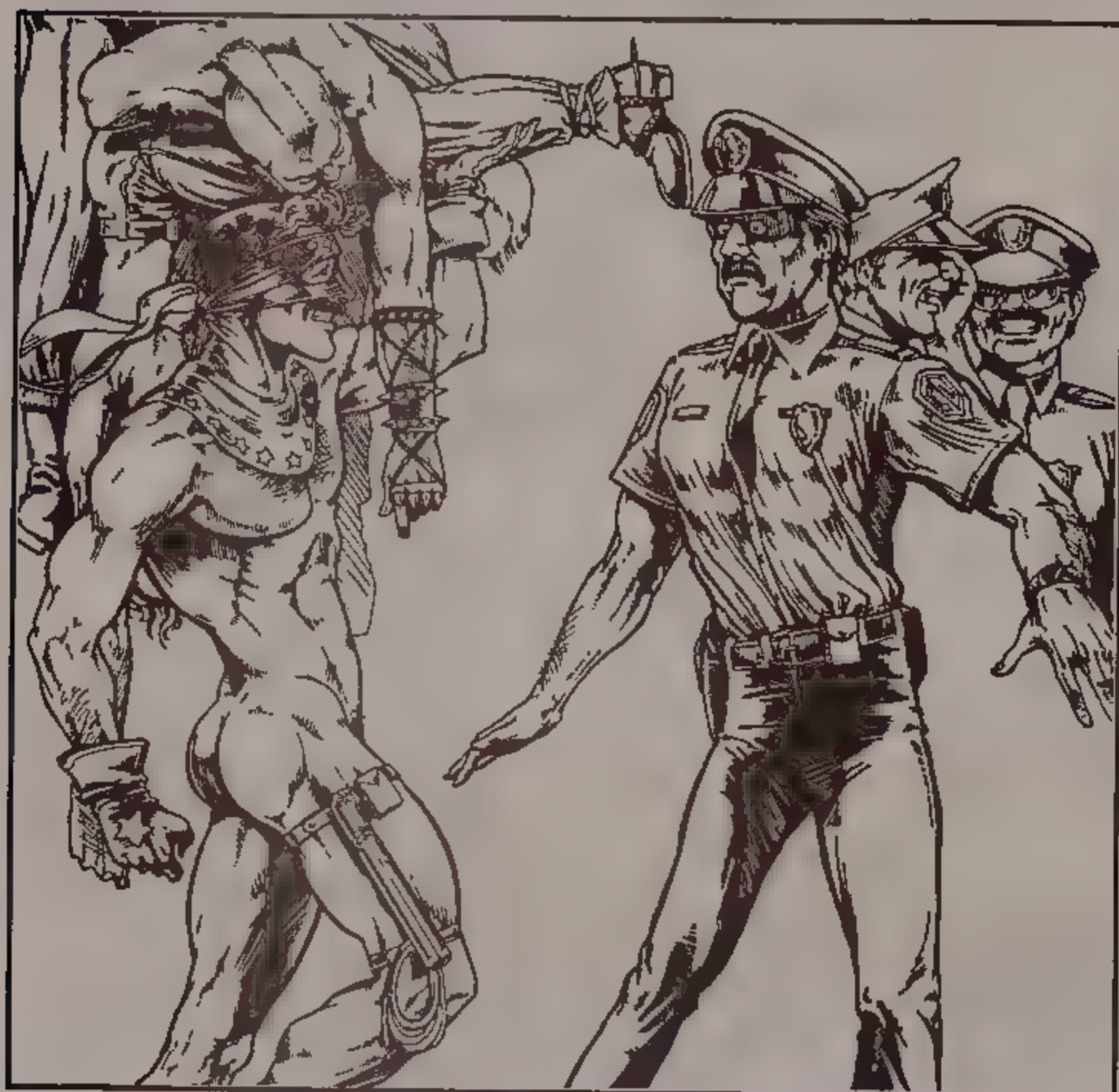
JM: What differentiates your idea from all the others though?

DG: Good question. I've designed all the characters. I don't know if anything differentiates these titles exclusively from every other title ever published. What I'm trying to do is keep the superhero concept, but it's "For Adults".

JM: Sort of what it would be like if there truly were superheroes in real life?

DG: Yes, precisely. They have adult lives and, even more than that, it's written for adult readers. The themes will be things that grown-ups deal with that kids and teenagers just don't "get". I don't think there will be a great appeal to the type of person who wants to pick up a comic to see, "Oh, how many people get killed in this issue?!" I'm not going for that type of thing. These books are for people who like to read. And like good art. In fact, the tag line on my imprint is "Comics For Grown-Ups". There will be adult themes, there will be nudity, there will be violence, there will be language. They won't always appear all in one issue but they will be there when the story warrants it. There will NOT be any hardcore pornographic depictions. That's taboo. I don't want to cross that bridge simply because it would throw the books into a whole different genre and that isn't at all what I'm going for.

The only other aspect that differentiates this project other than

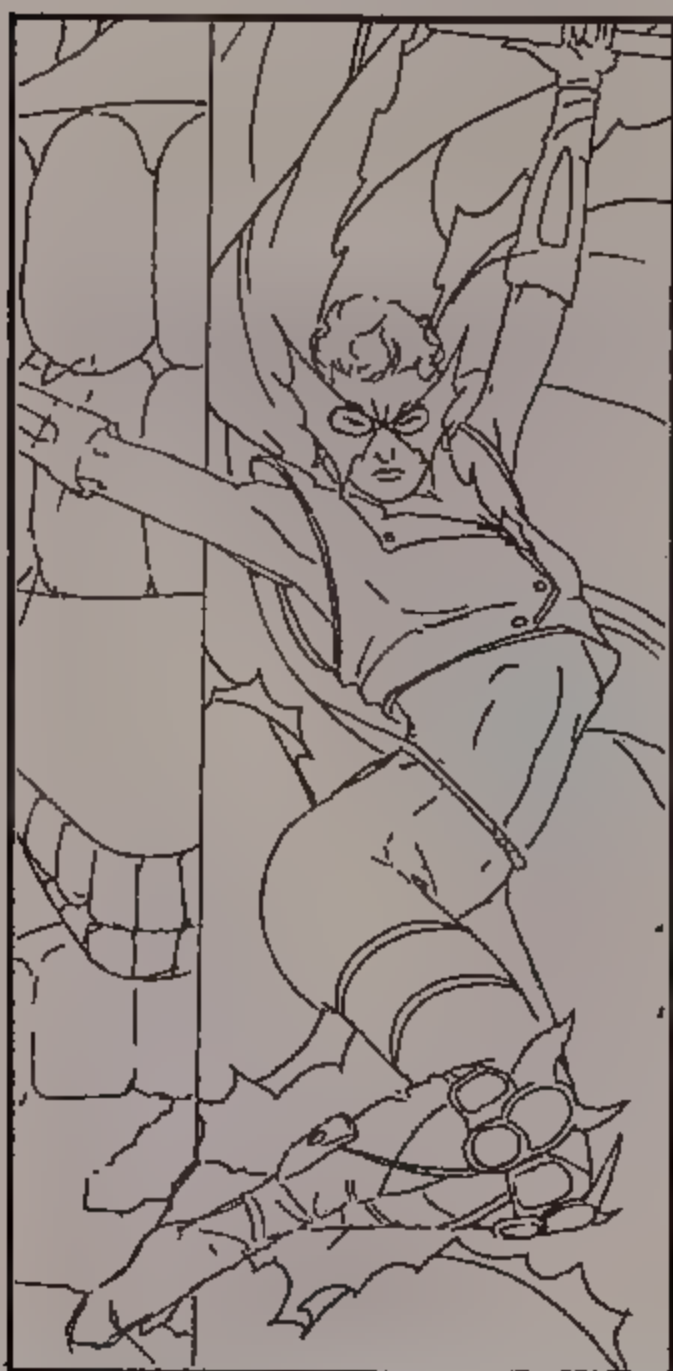


it being "adult superhero" is that it is all being designed to be done in black and white. There will be fully-painted covers and I'll be doing most of the cover work but there are two other artists that I really love their work so I'll be putting them on some of the projects. But I'm working the art so that it holds well and renders beautifully without having color.

JM: *Is there color possibilities?*

DG: Well, I'm certainly not opposed to it. It's not in my budget now or for the foreseeable future but if we grow well enough, color adds a lot to any book so I'm certainly not opposed. Color isn't necessarily the best thing to happen to every artist. In Statema's (*Deathstroke, the Terminator*) case on *She-Bat*, I think color would actually weaken the end product. It would cause him to really simplify the intricate work that he does because I think it would appear extremely muddy if he didn't.

JM: *Cool. Let's go back to the Reiki Warriors and have a run-*



down of the characters.

DG: Okay. We have *She-Bat*. *Murcielaga* was born and raised in a southern Los Angeles Hispanic community. She's a streetfighter, a real gangbanger in her teen years, and now she's pulled away from that and is out to save her community, her people, her heritage, and bring some positive imagery back into her culture. She's an excellent hand-to-hand martial artist and also has hyper-sensitive hearing.

Mr. No is the ultimate "nice guy". A difficult character to handle in comics sometimes is the good guy. The good guy has no faults and this can tend to be really shallow and uninteresting if not handled well. What I want to do is push the perfection enough to make these qualities problems unto themselves. By being so nice, Mr. No is creating problems for himself.

JM: *He actually lets the villains go after he beats them up.*

DG: Almost.

JM: *He feels like they've had enough and learned their lesson, eh?*

DG: Yeah, sort of. The way he thinks is, "How can someone do something wrong to begin with?" It's a psychological point-of-view that I think will actually give him greater depth than the standard "good guy." As far as powers go, Mr. No has the uncanny ability to assimilate movements that he sees. If he watches the Harlem Globetrotters one night, then he could go out after that and duplicate everything that they had done. He may not necessarily have the knowledge of the game to choose the right movements at the right time but if he's seen something, he now can do that.

Squamus is of Indian heritage - the Seneca tribe - and we're going to start exploring that in the stories and hopefully bring some cultural influence into it. He's got the standard martial arts skills that most Reiki Warriors have but he also has a degree of invulnerability that depends upon his emotional state of mind. Sometimes this can cause great problems for him because if he gets too excited then he can't





move.

JM: *Whoa. So his powers deal with the manipulation of density and a correlation between that and his sentient state?*

DG: Right. You know this well.

JM: *Hey, it's my job.*

DG: Very good [laughs]. Anyway, so as he gets tougher his mobility becomes limited and so does his sensitivity to touch. Squamus will be involved with the "netherworld" aspects of life.

Soliloquy Jones is a private investigator in her private life. She adds the "corporate-world-big-intrigue" aspect to the title. Her ability is a particular type of logic. Like a computer she can automatically deduct reason and logical pursuit quickly and very accurately. She's taken the martial arts training so that she's very adept in close combat situations but all in all is a reluctant hand-to-hand combatant. She tends to prefer guns and to stay out of the action if possible.

JM: *That's what I intend to do.*

DG: [Laughs] Me, too. Anyway these characters I've men-

tioned were all around in the first incarnation of the Reiki Warriors but one of the new additions is Rhesus. Rhesus has the martial arts skills, of course, but his heightened ability deals with acrobatics, therefore the name. Rhesus is a monkey.

JM: *Okay.*

DG: And he can leap around and make use of his acrobatic skills and apparatus without having to practice and size situations up. He just does it. In addition, he is the gay character of the group.

JM: *And you don't mean he's happy.*

DG: Right. That brings us to a special event that happens in *Reiki Warriors #2* that involves a gay-bashing and one of Rhesus' friends is involved who wasn't gay.

JM: *But they did it anyway?*

DG: Well, they had been seen together so that was just the case.

Ethereal Black is the last actual team member. She's not well-defined yet. She's magical in origin and is incorporated with a human body. At this stage, she can't do anything magical while in human form and can't do anything human while in magical form. She's trying to learn how to integrate the two forms so that all her abilities can co-exist but, in the beginning, she'll probably pretty much be a peripheral character.

And the last character is Sifu, who is the head of the school. He brought the characters together as students and then forged them into a team. He controls them in so far as sending them out on assignments and what tasks to take while at the same time improving their mind sets and the various methods of Kung Fu.

The last thing about Rhesus is that the one member of the team

that can't handle his gay identity well is Mr. No. He just has a real hard time dealing with it. Rhesus is also an obnoxious character as a person and Mr. No doesn't like him at all and coupling that with his homosexuality is a very difficult situation. Rhesus is a brat.

JM: *And I suppose it's kind of unfathomable for Mr. No thinking, "How could you not like women?"*

DG: Yeah. He doesn't want to be faced with it. "That's your private life, this is mine. Leave me alone." A lot of the storyline involving the gay bashing is Mr. No's involvement. He believes in stopping the gay bashers because what they're doing is wrong but he still has to be thrown in the situation. He's very uncomfortable all the way through it.

JM: *Cool. Well, everything is really thought out in your line of titles.*

DG: There's a wonderful thing, too, in the first story.

JM: *Okay, what is it?*

DG: All the characters die.

JM: *In Reiki?*

DG: Every one.

JM: *Then how can there be a number two?*

DG: "Read the book." [Laughs]



Brit Bits



News and gossip from across the ocean by Paul H. Birch

Alan Mitchell's work appeared in Rebel Studios' *Raw Media* at the tail end of last year — with two pages printed out of sequence, but who's counting! — and it looks more than likely he'll be writing an issue of *Conan*. Mitchell worked for the now defunct British comics magazine, *Speakeasy* before Pat Mills chose him as collaborator on 'Third World War' in the pages of *Crisis*, subsequently reprinted as its own title from Quality in the US, with the partnership continuing for 'Coffin', serialized in *Toxic!*.

The demands of fatherhood took up most of his time last year but at UKCAC '92 representatives from both Marvel UK and Dark Horse International were seen discussing possibilities with him, nonetheless whatever might come to fruition in that area will be decidedly different from his current major writing commitment, 'The Sodium Sisters'. It's to be serialized in *Decadence*, a bi-monthly fetish magazine from the Penthouse Publishing group. Yes, it's the type of periodical you'll get strange looks from attempting to justify that you're 'Only buying it for the comic section!', especially since it'll be a costly purchase, yet Mitchell believes it a valid avenue to explore within the medium saying, "It allows me to do something that doesn't have to adhere to mainstream comics restrictions."

His *Raw Media* side-kick, the curiously named Stix again takes up pen and ink for 'The Sodium Sisters'. He's also appropriated

cover work for *Aliens* (UK version) and *Overkill*.

Warheads artist, Dave Taylor, is among the artists scheduled to be involved in new books from Marvel Epic based on Moebius' *The Airtight Garage*. Scottish born, Cam Kennedy is also up for one, and there's the possibility of him doing further *Star Wars* books with Tom Veitch for Dark Horse.

Brian Bolland continues to produce covers for both *Animal Man* and *Wonder Woman*. 'Mr. Mamouliau' strips will continue to surface in unlikely places, while his 'Actress And The Bishop'

vignettes, two of which appeared in the first volume of *A1*, will show up again in 'The Actress And The Bishop And The Thing In The Shed'. It's to be 18 pages long, publication unspecified.

Horror author Guy N. Smith amongst who's credits are *The Crabs* has written a graphic novel featuring those self-same creatures. *Crab Fury* from Black Hill Books will be produced in b/w by *Judge Dredd Magazine*'s Charles Adlard.

It transpires a number of US independent publishers at the '92 San Diego convention are to be thanked for a Pan-European pub-



lishing deal based in Great Britain.

Mr. Ruichi Okijodan, a Japanese businessman involved in publishing, was looking for a trustworthy person to run a comic publishing company. These individuals volunteered the name of Terry Hooper, who has scripted work for Fantagraphics' Eros and Monster imprints.

The net result of this sees Hooper's small press banner, Black Tower Comics, revitalized as a fledgling publisher with twenty-one titles, as four to six issue mini-series scheduled to appear soon up until October '94.

It's a figure that's quite staggering, and of some concern under today's economic climate, but from what I've been able to ascertain thus far, it looks to be on a sound business basis, with the

books' printing already paid in advance, and assorted deals both arranged and being negotiated for US, and Western & Eastern Europe.

English language books will be distributed to foreign counties, but places like Finland and Russia will do their own translations additionally -- newsstand distribution is being negotiated with the Russian publishers/distributors. At the time of writing, Black Tower Comics are debating whether to go with established distributors in the UK or set up their own network.

Prior to the instigation of the company, Hooper had begun distributing US independent titles from MU Press & Blackbird into Europe. The manner by which it will continue or may be affiliated is unknown at present.

The initial releases are *Thaddeus Twatt*, described as "science-fantasy with humor" and either *Task Force Europe* or *Crimebuster UK*, which are superhero titles.

May-June should find Hooper's *Zine Zone International* magazine back, under the new title *Independent Comics News* from a US company, Blackbird Comics, in a deal made previous to the current Black Tower formation.

And to conclude with: Hooper's cohort on Eros' *Two Hot Girls On A Hot Summer Night*, Art Wetherall (plus numerous contributions to British comics & men's magazines), is adding loin-clothes to his characters -- he's working on a *Tarzan* mini-series for Malibu!

ARENA #14

MAGAZINE SEPT 93

JIM SHOOTER
IS MAKING COMICS HISTORY.
AGAIN.





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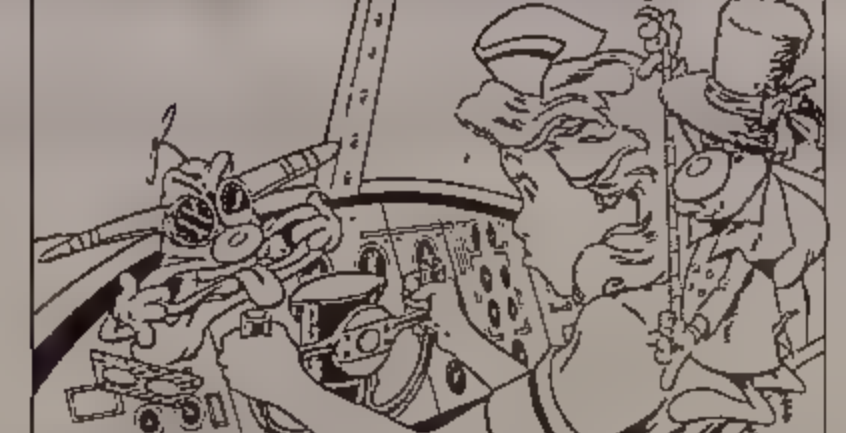
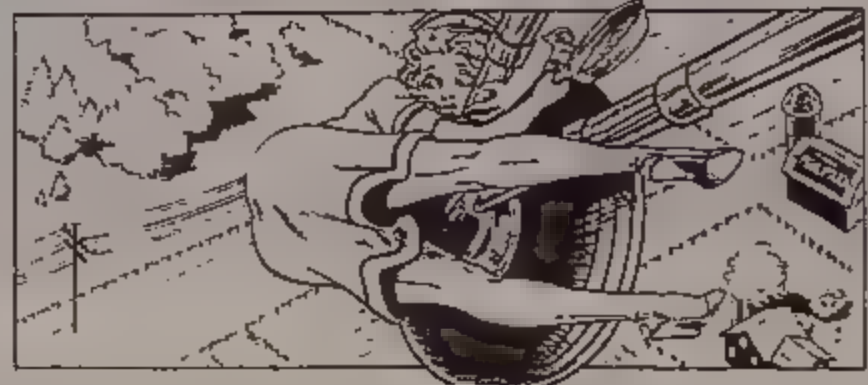
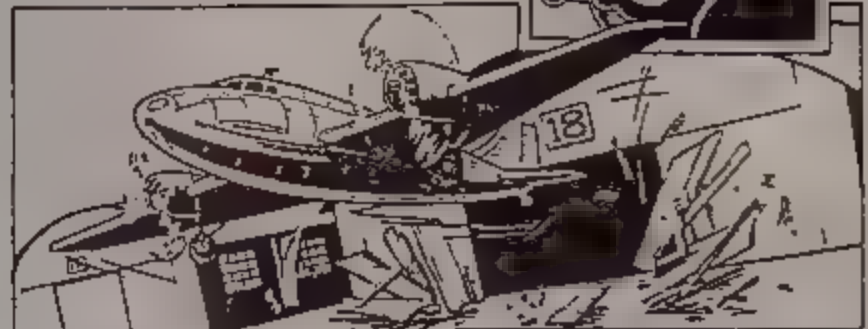
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PREVIEW

SKYGAL
by Brad Gorby
Published by AmeriComics





Creating A Defiant New Image

Compiled by Joe Martin

James C. Shooter: Defiant Dreamer

In 1965, at the age of only 13 years old, James C. Shooter began writing a book called *Superman*. He also wrote *Superboy* and several other titles for DC Comics. And he didn't just write about superheroes, he wanted to be one: Spider-Man, Peter Parker was the fellow. Just like Jim, he was a "good guy" with financial troubles, and the comic book universe was his way out. So, while working his way through high school as a comics writer, Jim got to work with Neal Adams, Gil Kane, Wally Wood, Curt Swan, Wayne Boring, Carmine Infantino, Sheldon Moldoff, Mort Weisenger and many other all-time greats.

After a brief stint creating advertising comics for U.S. Steel and others, Jim returned to mainstream comics in 1974. Sure enough, by 1976, he was hired as the editor of Marvel Comics. Within a span of two short years, Jim was promoted to Editor-In-Chief of Marvel. He was working with Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Don Perlin, Bill Sienkiewicz, Frank Miller, Chris Claremont, Archie Goodwin, Jim Starlin and many other industry legends. During his tenure, Shooter was responsible for introducing the industry's first performance incentive for creators, launching the first direct-only publications, making Marvel the first major publisher to publish creator-owned comics. Under Shooter's aegis, Marvel also introduced the graphic novel and other deluxe formats as well as the mega-crossover, which remains a staple of comics marketing today.

But in April 1987, Jim was fired by the "bad guys" for standing up for creator's rights, which were being routinely violated by Marvel at that time.

However, Jim Shooter could not really let go of the industry he had helped create, and he formed the Marvel Acquisition Partners, attempting to actually buy Marvel Comics! Ultimately though, Shooter was outbid by Ronald O. Perleman so in 1989 he joined forces with a group of talented young "creatives" and

seasoned business pros to start a brand new comics company, Valiant. His goal: To invent a superhero universe and its characters from the ground up. This was a feat no one had attempted since the '60s.

The company quickly hit its stride with the Valiant universe, a world of realistic superheroes created by Shooter himself. He pioneered some promotions and collectors' editions that quickly changed the face of comic book retailing. Although the company can now lay claim to 11 percent of the market-- a staggering achievement for the once-fledgling start-up -- it lost Shooter, who now views the experience as a "rough draft" of what he wants to do with his new company--the aptly named *DEFIANT*!

Who Is Defiant?

"I'm bringing together the folk I love to work with," he explains. "We've got a wonderful



financial deal, total creative control, and we are storytellers first, last and always. David Lapham, the best young artist in the business, is with us, and so is Publisher Winston Fowlkes, who was an executive at *Time, Inc.* for 30 years. Janet "J.J." Jackson is our Creative Director. Deborah Purcell, former Fiction Editor of *Redbook*, is Editorial Director.

"To me, when a little kid reads a comic, then ties a towel around his neck and flies around the living room -- or if he's too old for that, but wishes he could--that's when the job is done," he says. "My biggest influence, Mark Twain, made me understand what makes a great story. It's hard -- impossible -- to tell a great story without having an important message to share, so you need to have something to say. We do. The imperative is to do it in an enteraining way."

A rundown of the innovative Defiant team is as follows:

Winston Fowlkes, Publisher. A Time, Inc. executive for 30 years, Fowlkes served as a senior corporate financial officer and as publisher of Time/Life Books in Europe.

Deborah Purcell, Editorial Director. After beginning her career at Columbia Pictures and CBS Inc., Purcell moved to consumer magazine publishing and, most recently, headed the Fiction Department of Redbook.

Clark Smith, Sales and Marketing. Smith was a sales and marketing executive in the securities industry before entering the entertainment field. Most recently, he was in sales and marketing, as well as development, for CineQuest Entertainment Corporation.

Janet "J.J." Jackson, Creative Director. One of the founders of Voyager Communications/Valiant, Jackson served there as design director. She has also served as Art Director of Advertising at Marvel and is a well-known colorist in the business.

Debbie Fix, General Manager. Also an original member of Voyager/Valiant, Fix serves there as office manager. She has worked for several Fortune 500 companies.

"I view my career up until now as a series of

rough drafts for what we're going to do with Defiant," says Shooter. "For me, it's the greatest odyssey I've ever been on. We're going to focus unilaterally on telling great stories and creating great superheroes and the universe they live in. We're going to create active partnerships with every facet of the industry: retailers, distributors, creators and fans. We're all fans. We all come from the same rootstock. The rest will take care of itself."

The Pioneer Story... Plasm

The cornerstone of the new Defiant universe is *Plasm*, a visually outrageous, high-concept fantasy that is the new wave in the marketplace. The *Plasm* storyline takes place both in our world and in extradimensional worldspace. A nanosecond-thin reality veil separates Earth from this other place, *Plasm*, which is to its dimension what the Roman Empire was to ancient Earth. Manipulation of lining tissue is as normal in *Plasm* as changing clothes is here, so Plasmoids are unimaginably diverse. Everything is alive and all things are genetically engineered on *Plasm*.

The story takes place both in our world and in an extradimensional worldspace. A nanosecond-thin reality veil separates Earth from this other place, a continuum dominated by a mega-empire called Plasm. Plasm is to its dimension what the Roman Empire was to ancient Earth.

Natural laws are the same in our dimension as in Plasm-space, but the nature of things is vastly different. Plasm is organic. Technology is advanced but bio-systemic. In short, everything is alive, even things that seem to be machines. Everything is a part of the ecosystem and no matter is inert or unactive for long.

Manipulation of living tissue is as normal on Plasm as is changing clothes here, so Plasmoids are unimaginably diverse. Horns may be in fashion this week, or twigs instead of hair.

The soldiers of *Plasm* -- Zombots -- are uniform and designed purposefully. There are billions of soldiers. Plasm sustains itself and grows by incorporating new biomass into its own. It is as though the empire regards itself as one entity and thinks no more of encompassing additional biomass than we think of eating a salad.

There is a callousness toward death in this society that is overwhelming. Since "nothing

is lost" in the sense that everything is recycled into the system, *Plasm* is brutal and horrifying to the sensibilities of our kind. And even to some of their kind.

One such is Lorca, a high-ranking No-Zom, or freethinker, in the military. Lorca is, like many, a believer in the sanity of individual life. He has served as a loyal soldier, hiding his true convictions, but only in order to work his way into the Empire and the establishment of a new order.

Lorca discovers the dimensional barrier, and Earth, and senses opportunity. Keeping this vast pool of biomass secret from high command, he plans to bring in hordes of randomly chosen Earthlings and use Plasm's genetic technology to reform them into a super-army, which he will use to spearhead a revolution.

Working with desperate speed, Lorca enacts his plan. Ten thousand Earthlings are pulled across the barrier and genetically reengineered. But haste causes a miscalculation. Only five survive.

- A middle-aged housewife;
- A one-armed working man;
- A soldier in the reserves;
- A college girl; and,
- An Episcopal minister.

Fearing discovery, Lorca attempts a cover-up. He tries to destroy the five Earthlings. In time, he thinks, another opportunity will arise. However, he has underestimated the power he has given these five and, more importantly, the power of the human spirit.

Plasm is the story of five ordinary people who conquer fear, failure and the limits of the human condition and strive against an Empire.

"What if you had complete control of genetic engineering?" adds Shooter. "What would have happened in a maxed-out bio-system? Play the 'what if' game. What would the social mores be? The games? Everything would be recycled. Murder would be a misdemeanor, but failure to recycle would be a capital offense."

Indeed, the national pastime of *Plasm* is Splatterball. Imagine a game that comprises elements of football, auto racing and Roman gladiatorial combat. Players and the powerful beast-like creatures that comprise the team are genetically altered as needed during play by pit

crews called DNAbalers. Even the ball is alive, and often not too happy about its predicament. To score, you have to spike the ball -- that is, impale it on the spikes of the goal post. The first team to score wins. Losers are mulched.

What Defiant Stands For

Carefully. With the wisdom and seasoning of a 41-year old veteran and visionary, Jim has started over again. This new company will be a quality, creator-friendly, enlightened comics publisher. It will be called Enlightened Entertainment Partners, L.P. It will publish under the imprint Defiant. It will be created of, for and by the "Good Guys".

"I want us to be known as the revolutionaries that we are," says Shooter. "We're not in this for the 'business as usual' of it. You can tell that from this first story line, you can tell it from our commitments to our collaborators. We're creator-friendly and we guarantee we will care and be responsive. This is a whole new world we're creating.

"We are storytellers. Don't look for market manipulation gimmicks. We're going all the way back to the basics. Nothing makes a book more collectible than a great story line. I don't care and I promise you I'll never look at what the price guide says my comics are worth. I'll know we're on the right track when I get a submission from a 13-year-old with a vision and a passion for our stories."

Remember: Stan Lee was 41 when he started Marvel...

This time for sure.



A Conversation With ...Sky Comics

Interview by Dan Souder

Sky Comics is one of the various alternate publishers that will be coming out with a variety of high quality titles in the latter half of 1993 and I felt that an interview letting the readers know what these guys have in store would be a cool thing to do. The publisher of Sky Comics is Bob Hickey and the Editor-In-Chief is Joe Martin. It's with these exuberant fellows with which I spoke. Here goes.

Dan Souder: What is Sky Comics?

Bob Hickey: A hole-in-the-wall in Florence, KY [laughs]. Seriously, Sky is a grand scheme that's been years in the process of making. Everything started over two and a half years ago.

Joe Martin: Jeez! Has it been that long?

BH: Yeah, you were just a pup.

JM: Hey, I was twenty. That must seem pretty young to you, eh, Bob?

BH: Shut up. [Laughs] Anyway, way back then Joe and I started working on this project that we wanted to publish and I told Joe that he should familiarize himself with the distributors. Calls were made and everything seemed pretty cool until...

JM: Until the orders came in.

BH: Yeah.

JM: It's kind of shocking. You can't go into this industry half-cocked and thinking that your book is the next hit project because more than likely you're going to be very disappointed. Too many retailers have been burned. Too many people have found out that most alternate press, or "independents", are put out by these fly-by-night amateurs publishing out of their base-

ments.

BH: I hate the word "independents."

JM: Yeah, I know but it seemed like the correct word to use.

DS: Why do you hate it?

BH: From my opinion, independent means free. Free of what? Marvel? DC? No, what we are is alternate press. We're an alternative to Marvel and DC and any other company. It's just something else to read and enjoy.

JM: As I was saying, though. The orders were low, like 3,000 copies or something, and it hit us pretty hard. But if there is one thing I've found out about that guy [Bob] is that he's stubborn as a mule. There was no way he was going to let something like "retailer retention" stop this company.

DS: What was the book you guys were working on?

BH: That's not important.

JM: [Laughs] Right. The thing is, Bob was determined now to make this thing work and that determination quickly carried over. I've never lost anything I really wanted in my whole life. I really want this. I want to work in comics. We both do.

BH: But getting back to the main question, Sky Comics is a "valiant" effort, pardon the pun, to do the comics, in color, that we want to do in a cohesive universe that is creator-owned. Like I said, we've had a couple years to perfect the projects that we're working on and it's allowed us to also meet a lot of people — a lot of professional creators — that, after seeing our plan and our capabilities, were eager to become part of this.

DS: Yeah, I read that you guys have some creator-owned



projects by comics professional in the works. Can you go into detail about this?

BH: Sure. Everything at Sky is creator-owned. We've got one project that I'm particularly excited about. It's called *Dead Kid* and it's by Tom and Mary Bierbaum who write *Legionnaires* and *Legion of Superheroes* for DC Comics.

DS: *Dead Kid*?

JM: Yeah, and don't let the name fool you. *Dead Kid* is dark and gritty humor. Tom and Mary are being extra flippant with this project and it's going to be a riot. Obviously, *Dead Kid* is dead. He's also a superhero. You can blow his arm off, and he'll just stick it right back on. It's really cool and it's going to be really fun.

We've also got Rick (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*) McCollum working for us... Don (*Streetfighter*) Hillsman, Brad (*FemForce*, *Parts Unknown*) Gorby...

BH: Who is doing some awesome stuff.

JM: Yeah, Gorby's pencils on *Blood & Roses* is really kicking. The man can draw women!

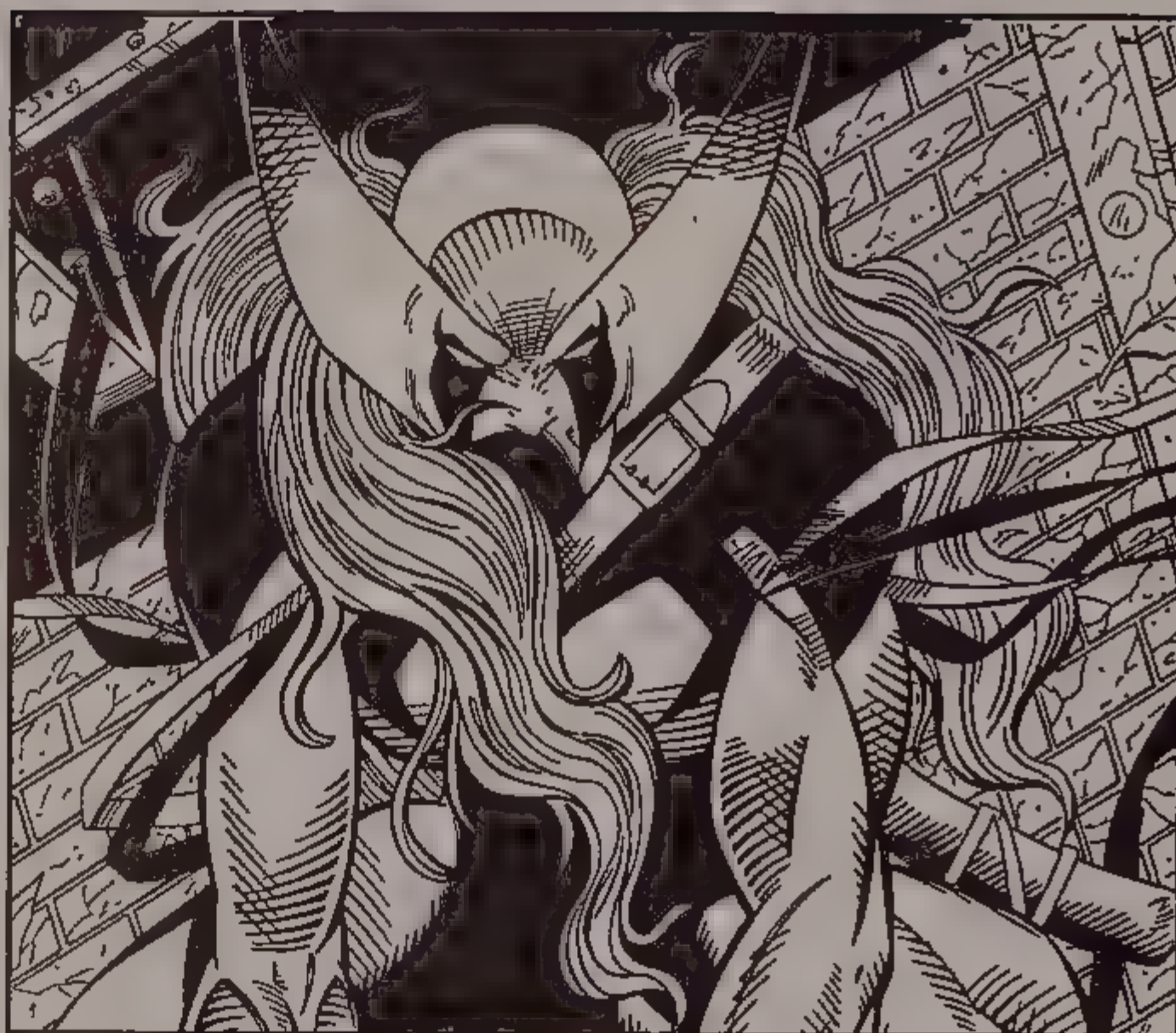
BH: And we've got Daerick (*Necroscope*, *Batman*) Gross and Lurene (*Green Arrow*, *ST:DSN*) Haines doing fully painted covers for us. Let's see, Franchesco (*Green Lantern Corps Quarterly*) is doing a cover and Joe's talking to Dave Dorman about some cover work.

JM: So you can see we're very serious about making Sky Comics work.

DS: Definitely! So give us a rundown of titles.

BH: Joe?

JM: [Sighs] Okay, there's the *Seeker*, our dark-vengeance-supernatural-type heroine; there's *Blood & Roses*, a duo of damsels from the past and the future that are thrown together as agents of



the timestream; *Tempered Steele*, our number one superhero title; *Dead Kid*, which you've already heard about; *Ashley Dust*, a "necroborg" which is the integration of a dead female sorceress and a cyborg, it's a fantastic story; *Morgana X*, a female bounty hunter from the future; *Talisanta*, which is an adaptation of the roleplaying game by Stephan Michael Sechi; and we've got more just "waiting in the wings."

DS: Both of you are working on some of your own titles, too, right?

BH: Joe created and writes *Seeker* and he's got Willie (*Southern Knights*) Peppers and Allen (*Speed Racer*) Freeman working on some of that and I created *Blood & Roses* and *Tempered Steele*.

JM: It's really odd, actually, how the concept for *Blood & Roses* was hatched.

BH: I wanted Joe to draw a large-sized print.

JM: Sometimes I draw, too.

BH: Yeah, and I ink, but I wanted this print to generate us some money at conventions because we do tons of those things and I thought it could be a cool thing to have. I said, "I don't

know, do a couple babes with swords and a big monster or something." So, he did and it sold like crazy! People kept asking, "When's this going to be out? When's this comic coming out?" We were like, "It's not." But after the question kept getting asked and asked at con after con, we finally took the hint and created a whole storyline around it.

JM: The fans speak.

BH: Yeah.

DS: When are these titles going to be out?

JM: Spoken like a true fan [laughs]. We'll debut our color line beginning in September.

DS: Why in the fall? Why not at the height of summer like everyone else?

BH: That's exactly why. Because everybody else is doing it.

JM: Too much competition. We'll let the "big boys" fight it out this summer and then, in the midst of the wreckage and the destruction, will dawn a shining blue ray of hope, a bolt out of the blue... Sky Comics!

DS: Spoken like a true writer.

Stay tuned because next month we're going to zero in and take an even closer look at Sky Comics.



If I were Editor of ... X-Men

by Jerry Smith

Usually an article or essay suggesting changes or improvements to a work indicate the writer's unhappiness with the product. Here, such is not the case. Despite the mass departure from Marvel's mutant books (some forceably, some voluntarily) of some of the best creative talent in comics, *The Uncanny X-Men* and its companion titles, *X-Men*, *X-Factor*, and *Wolverine* are still remarkably good. I don't read *Excalibur* or *X-Force*, so I can't speak to the quality of those titles. Improvements can and should be made to the titles in question; even a good thing can be better.

If I was in charge of the long-suffering mutants of the Marvel Universe, here's what I would do:

I'd like to start off with general comments about the identity and direction of the mutant books as a whole, then follow up with specific editorial suggestions for each book.

Byrne/Claremont purists aside, there are plenty of things to enjoy about the latest wave of Merry Marvel mutant stories. The art has never been better, the stories are still interesting (surprising, in the wake of the void left by Chris Claremont's departure), and

Marvel seems to be committed to keeping the finest artists and writers available on the various X books.

This is surprising because, after Chris Claremont and John Byrne built the *X-Men* into a cash cow for Marvel, the company could easily put anyone on the art or writing chores and the book would sell. Witness the various Spider-Man titles, whose creative teams are mostly old-time, competent writers and artists. They get the job done, but they're hardly fan favorites. Spider-Man is an institution though, so the books sell.

And so would the *X-Men* sell with inferior creative teams, at least for a while.

Instead of turning over the X-books to the old guard, Marvel has had the foresight to let the young guns take the ball and run with it. Names like Scott Lobdell, Fabian Nicieza, and Andy Kubert keep popping up all over *X-Men* and *Uncanny X-Men*. Massive mistakes were made by Marvel in losing top talents like Chris Claremont, John Byrne (the first and second time), and Peter David, but then, strong-willed creators with a unique personal vision have a hard time making it at corporate giant like Marvel. When a personal vision runs up against the company bottom line, it doesn't take Donald Trump to predict who's going to win. Most of the people presently working on these books probably won't last as long as their predecessors, but large comic book companies tend to chew up and spit out their creative teams quickly.

The biggest problem



with the present X-books is that they tell a constantly revolving story that is never quite resolved. Sure, Claremont/Byrne's *X-Men* was a soap opera, but at least the stories had endings. Plus, it was good soap opera. Even the TV soaps have endings to their storylines. Erica Kane of *All My Children* might have been married eight or nine times, but at least her relationships had a beginning, a middle, and an end. Except for Travis, that one dragged on and on and on ... but you get the idea. When was the last time anyone in any of the X-books got married? Or even fell in love? If they are unlucky enough to fall for someone, their love interest is quickly killed off or dropped from the book (usually from about five stories up). These characters would be more realistic if they formed actual relationships like real people. Everyone but superheroes has friends outside of work.

These books have to start featuring stories that have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Remember all of the "big" mutant crossovers of the last few years? What have they yielded, but for a lot of characters getting together and having a nifty time? Remember the "X-tinction Agenda?" Was anything ever resolved by that? There was a lot of middle, but no end.

Chris Claremont is one of the finest writers to work in comics, but one of his faults was to leave major plotlines dangling, sometimes for years. Unfortunately, that is a trait readily absorbed by the new X-writers. I thought new writers would make major changes and move all of the mutant teams forward, but instead the status quo has been painfully maintained. The books are always fun to read, but will Jean and Scott ever get married? Who is Gambit (and hasn't he been in the team long enough to trust



his teammates with his past)? Will Wolverine (one of the most mishandled comic book characters in history) ever straighten out his mind and memories? Will Storm ever get la... find a worthy man? Will Bishop's future ever be explained? Some of these plots have been dragged out for all the dramatic tension they're worth. It's time to resolve them and come up with new ones.

More specifically, I'd like to address what I would attempt to improve with individual titles, starting with: - *The Uncanny X-Men*: No one, especially not John Byrne, is sure what happened to John Byrne on this title. Byrne took over the book from Chris Claremont with hopes of being on it for quite some time as writer. Somehow, Scott Lobdell took over as writer soon after. When I saw his by-line on the first issue he had written, I thought, "Who is this guy and how did he end up writing X-Men?" I still don't know much more than the fact that he came out of nowhere and blew the doors off of this book.

Lobdell has an ear for the great Claremont-style dialog that makes this book successful, without going overboard

into pastiche. His plots are original and fun, and he is extremely good with "let's-take-a-breather" issues. Like Claremont, Lobdell is comfortable with entire stories where characters just talk to each other and nobody throws a punch or uses their powers.

I'm not sure much could be improved about this book. Only what I have already mentioned--tie up those dangling plot threads and progress the storyline. It's time to actually progress the characters as people. Does Bishop want Storm? Will you go ahead and bring back Magneto? We all know he's not dead ... or, not too dead to come back, anyway. Are Professor X and Jubilee really tottering toward a romance? Do it! And don't take the next five years to develop the relationship. Growth and change is what progress is all about.

- *X-Men*: Fabian Nicieza knows what makes group books work. He knows his X-Men and his group dynamics. His characters talk a bit too much, but readers accept the good and bad when the writer's major influence is (him again) Chris Claremont.

Nicieza has been writ-

ing the adjectiveless X-Men book for over a year, and he does keep getting better. His current subplot dealing with a possible Scott Summers/Betsy Braddock romance is as nasty as it is pleasing. Nicieza has gone his own way with these characters while still remaining true to what has happened in the past.

Nicieza is a fine writer, so I hope he'll understand if I make a suggestion. If I were editor, I would stop at nothing to rehire Chris Claremont to write X-Men. I doubt Claremont would ever return to the monthly comic salt mines, and if he did it wouldn't be to write X-Men, but I miss his overwhelming style. It's true that I really didn't care for his last year or so on Uncanny, and I was tired of plots going nowhere for years, but Chris has had over a year to rest up and refresh himself after a twenty-year grind. Plus, it was rather spiteful of Marvel to just fire a writer who had basically made the company over the last two decades. I'm sure Marvel would still exist if Claremont had never taken over the X-Men, but would they have been able to sell stock so easily and have fifty-million dollar years without the windfall profits the X-Men and all its various spin-offs have provided? Personally, I think it's doubtful. In my mind, Claremont had earned the right to do whatever he wanted with the group, and if I were editor, X-Men would reflect that.

- X-Factor: Until issue #90, this was one of the comics I looked most forward to reading. This comic is another title doomed by editorial politics. Peter David, a dynamic comic writer with a strong (and funny) personal vision in regards to all of his characters, had been writing X-Factor until this issue. As he has written recently, editorial interference in his scripts (among other reasons) caused him to quit the book. It's too

bad, David was really warming up to the X-Factor characters. He was doing some interesting things with Rahne, the werewolf character, when he quit, so it's sad we'll never get to see what he had planned for her. Or anyone else. Scott Lobdell is listed as the writer on issue #90. It remains to be seen whether or not he will be the new regular writer.

If I were editor, I'd rehire Peter David right away and not inject silly changes into his work at all, much less without consulting him. He's too good a writer to let him get away that easily.

- Wolverine: As I pointed out, Wolverine is the most misunderstood, badly-written character in comics. Larry Hama, the regular writer, does a decent job, but he, like most Wolverine writers, makes the mistake of turning this book just another adventure comic. Like most Batman comics, it's not bad, but it doesn't do one of my favorite characters justice, either.

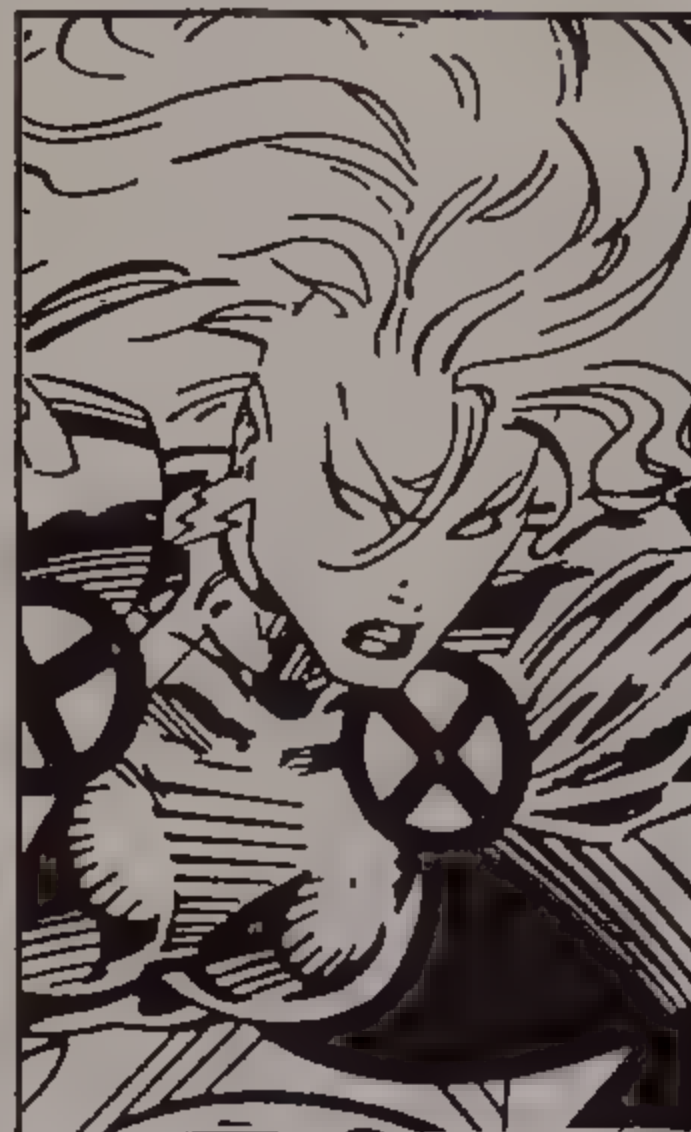
Wolverine is a samurai, an honorable warrior with a vicious streak a mile wide. Especially if someone he loves is threatened. Too many writers have made him a one-dimensional "thing." Mostly he is reduced to being a smoking, rough-talking cowboy who dispenses bits of sushi-type wisdom.

The biggest problem with the present Wolverine comic is the revisionist history going on (and on, and on). Marvel likes to take the moral high ground and claim they don't revise their character's histories, but they do and just get sneaky about it. I prefer the DC Comics way of revising: cut your losses and start completely over. It's really more honest than the Marvel way. Whenever they want to change something about one of their characters, Marvel just claims that the character's memories are wrong, or messed

up, or missing, or whatever. This usually entails massive additions to the character's origin and eventually takes a bookshelf edition comic to sort out all the different versions of the story.

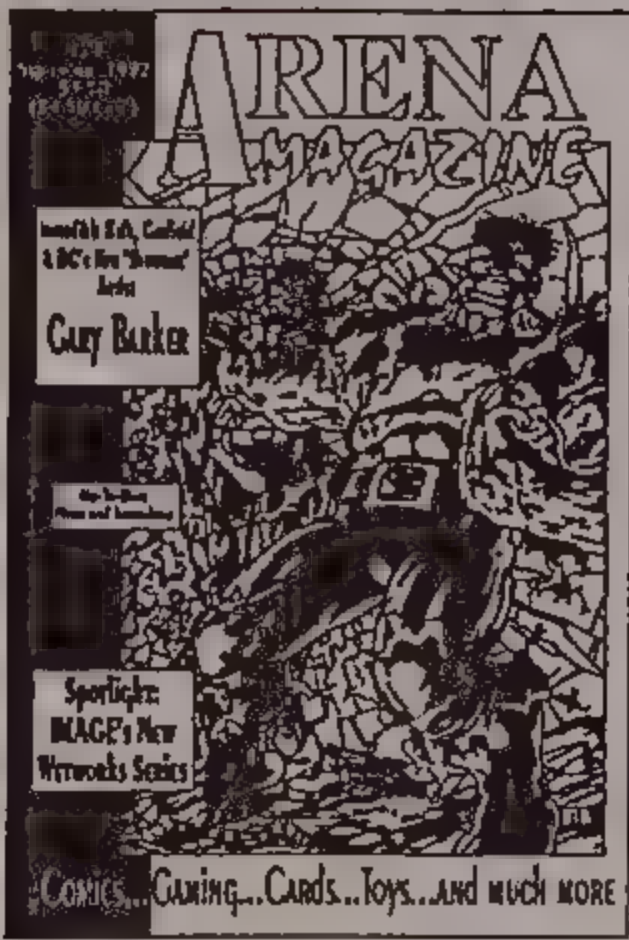
In Wolverine's case, Larry Hama is revising the character's past by claiming that a bunch of good stories we've read over the last few years really didn't happen, and that the Canadian government was messing with his mind for some reason, planting false memories (pretty slick, huh? Marvel doesn't revise its character's pasts, no sir!). Trouble is, no one knows what the real memories are, or how to tell the false memories from the real ones. Yup, nobody knows what's going on, including Wolverine, the readers, and Larry Hama.

This "My god! My memories are ... gone! I don't know what to believe ... who to trust!" stuff has been dragged out to what seems like the end of time. If Marvel editors can't decide on a definitive past for Wolverine, why not just leave it alone? It would save giving him a new memory every time somebody decided they didn't like his past. If I were editor, I'd give the character a definitive past. A good one.



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Trading Card News

Comic Images News

Frazetta Gets Second Series

Frank Frazetta has long been considered the father of fantasy art. His first Comic Images trading card series spurred overwhelming excitement for his artwork and his genre, sparking the fantasy art collector card trend. Now Comic Images journeys back to where it all began, with *Frazetta II: The Legend Continues*. This 90-card series will span the spectrum of Frazetta's work, from his earliest days in comics to his most recent renditions of the bizarre and the fantastic. As a bonus, six special cards will be randomly inserted within the series -- three of Comic Images classic Chromium Cards, and three of their newest sensation, the Spectroscope Cards! Mark your calendar for this important June release.



Norman Rockwell Trading Cards

A 90-card series with six randomly inserted cards printed on a unique woodgrain stock! Norman Rockwell captured the essence of Americana during a kinder, gentler time in history, so much so that we often associate the ideal lifestyle as "something out of a Norman Rockwell painting." Now Comic Images brings the idyllic innocence of Rockwell's work to life again in a brand new, high quality series of collector cards. Experience the magic of that bygone era -- a time when Rockwell told stories of a nation through a paintbrush -- as it was reflected best: on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Each of the full color 90 cards in this series will feature one of Rockwell's illustrations taken from the covers of *The Post*, as well as the six special cards, printed on unique woodgrain stock, which will be randomly inserted within the series. Relive the memories this June!

SkyBox News

Ultraverse Cards Unraveled

SkyBox recently announced that it has signed an exclusive multi-year licensing agree-

ment with Malibu Comics to produce trading cards featuring characters from the Malibu Comics line. The first card line to be produced under this agreement will be *Ultraverse Comic Cards*, featuring the Super Heroes, Super-Villains, teams, and culture from the Malibu Ultraverse.

The *SkyBox Ultraverse Comic Cards* will ship in August, and feature all-new original art created exclusively for this card line by the top artists at Malibu. According to SkyBox, this "100-card set will provide a bible of biographical and other information from the editors at Malibu Comics critical to understanding the past, present, and future of the Ultraverse."

A bonus subset of nine Ultraverse rookies, featuring characters who will not make their first appearance in Malibu Comics until later that year, will be randomly inserted in a limited number of *Ultraverse Comic Card* packs. Four Ultraverse rookies will have foil-stamped cards and two "bonus cards will feature original artwork of two top Ultraverse characters, transferred to cards with a never before seen process."

Special preview prototypes of the cards will be inserted in each first issue of all the Ultraverse titles due out in June and July (currently scheduled to be *Prime*, *Hardcase*, *Strangers*, *Freex*, and *Mantra*).

Super Mario Bros. Trading Cards

SkyBox International Inc. announced today that it has signed an exclusive license agreement

to produce and distribute trading cards featuring the characters, scenes, and special effects from this summer's most anticipated movie: *Super Mario Bros.*

The 100-card set will include 91 story cards which feature crisp, on-set photography and a descriptive summary of the movie's engaging plotline. Seven special behind the scenes cards will provide an inside look at production sketches and the exciting special effects developed for this movie. A movie title card and checklist will complete the set.

Three bonus holograms will be inserted in a limited number of randomly selected eight-card packs of *Super Mario Bros. Trading Cards*. The holograms will be produced utilizing true-color and multi-image processing, yielding a unique collectible from the movie.

Super Mario Bros. Trading Cards will be available May 26, 1993, to coincide with the national opening of *Super Mario Bros.*, which is expected to be one of the summer's top-grossing films. The cards will be shipped in cases of ten 36-pack boxes; the eight-card packs will carry a suggested retail price of \$0.99.

More than 80 million video games featuring the Super Mario Brothers have been sold in the United States alone since 1986, making *Super Mario Bros.* the most popular video game franchise in history. The movie, which serves as a "prequel" to the video game, and features the adventures of the super Mario Brothers — the plumbers Mario and Luigi — in "Dinohattan", a dinosaur-inhabited world to which they are transported from their native Brooklyn. As in the video game, Mario and Luigi battle evil as unlikely modern day heroes.

The action-packed movie stars Dennis Hopper, Bob Hoskins, and Fisher Stevens, and targets boys 8-16, the same age group as the largest demographic group of video game players and trading card purchasers. The movie, which is being distributed by Disney's Hollywood Pictures, is being supported by a massive national advertising launch, as well as a huge licensing program, the latter coordinated by Leisure Concepts, Inc.

Bloodlines Preview Cards

The *DC Bloodlines* card, a sample of which is enclosed for your information, includes artwork and a brief description of each of the four new beings claiming to be Superman in the DC Universe. This card serves as a unique prototype card for the *DC Bloodlines* card series scheduled for release by SkyBox this June, as it utilizes that card series' innovative and colorful design concept.

These four Supermen represent the first four of more than 20 new characters who will be introduced to the DC Universe over the next few months and take part in the eagerly-anticipated *Bloodlines* story, which will run through 23 DC Annuals from May until October. These New Blood characters will then join the most powerful DC Super Heroes in an effort to defeat a group of extraterrestrial parasites which have invaded the earth in a two-issue limited series called *Bloodbath*.

The *DC Bloodlines* comic card line will provide an 81-card artistic and editorial summary of

this incredible *Bloodlines* storyline, including 18 New Blood ("rookie") cards featuring new Super Heroes and Super Villains to be introduced in the annual series and seven Parasite cards. *DC Bloodlines Trading Cards* will feature all new, all original artwork created exclusively for this set by the top artists at DC Comics.

Finally, five bonus cards will be randomly inserted in the eight-card packs of *DC Bloodlines Trading Cards*, including four super-premium, foil-embossed cards of the "new" Supermen, and one very limited bonus Superman Exchange Card. Similar to the incredibly successful 1992 NBA Draft Lottery Pick Exchange Card randomly inserted in packs of 1992-1993 NBA HOOPS Series I, the bonus Superman Exchange Card may be exchanged for the first card of the real Superman, when the mystery surrounding the demise of The Man of Steel in last year's *Doomsday* series is finally resolved.



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